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Mature Women Beyond Foster Care: Narratives on Fractors contributing to Subjective Well-Being and Life-Sustaining Skills

Marie Elizabeth Moore
numbersage@att.net

University of San Francisco

MATURE WOMEN BEYOND FOSTER CARE: NARRATIVES ON FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AND LIFE-SUSTAINING SKILLS

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Dissertation Abstract

Mature Women Beyond Foster Care:
Narratives on Factors Contributing to Subjective
Well-Being and Life-Sustaining Skills

Studies show that African American children enter foster care at a higher rate and remain in foster care longer. The numbers of Black children in foster care increases in any given year. Studies found that even when controlling for risk and poverty, race affects the decision of whether to provide services or remove children from their families. Although poverty may serve as an indicator of risk, when race is included, it changes the decision threshold.

African American women who aged out of foster care and are living self - sustaining lives are small in number and there is an absence of research on their experiences after leaving care. Although there is a plethora of research on the disproportionate overrepresentation of African American children in the child welfare system, there is a dearth of research on adult women who are leading productive lives despite the challenges of having been in foster care.

Studies show that adolescent girls lack the skills to navigate their independence after emancipation, become pregnant, and end up on welfare, thereby continuing a cycle of Child Protective Service involvement for their own child(ren). Some girls resort to prostitution or gang involvement as a means to earn money to support themselves. In California, 67% of females who emancipated from the child-welfare system had at least one child within 5 years of leaving care. Although the statistics show poor outcomes for adolescent girls after leaving care, this study hopes to provide a picture of different outcomes.

This study examined factors that influenced the motivation, perseverance, and development of life-sustaining skills and personal and interpersonal influences associated with subjective well-being after emancipating from foster care, and the accomplishment of educational goals. The results of the study found that positive mother–child relationships, support from trusted adults, independence, and self-reliance contributed to motivation to persevere. Additional findings included the determination to improve one's life and perceived achievement of goals despite adversities, contributing to subjective well-being in adulthood. Recommendations suggested the inclusion of foster youth in the decisions made for them, prioritizing their needs prior to placement with relatives.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Marie E. Moore	June 5, 2013
Candidate	Date

Dissertation Committee

Betty Taylor, Ph.D.	June 5, 2013
Chairperson	Date
Patricia Mitchell, Ph. D.	June 5, 2013
	Date
Emma Fuentes, Ph.D.	June 5, 2013
	Date

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Christine Huddleston. Though she has been gone for such a long time, she has appeared to me in dreams to let me know she is proud of me. Throughout this journey, I have felt her loving presence when I most needed it and I awakened renewed and inspired. Thank you, Mom. This is for you.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my grandson, Zachary Donovan Johnston. He has surprised his grandma with delicious dinners he has cooked himself, and has been a quiet supporter in this endeavor. I have always told Zach that dreams do come true, and this dissertation is one of my dreams that came true. He knows that if you work hard, and stick with it, he will ultimately realize his dreams as well. I love you, my grandson.

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expertise, and experience as a professor has my utmost respect and I appreciate that she is part of my committee for this endeavor. Thank you so much Dr. Mitchell.

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And last but definitely not least, I want to thank the six wonderful courageous women that participated in this dissertation. You all shared a special part of yourselves that raised the dissertation to another level for this study. Each of you brought a uniqueness that was all your own. You each possess such wonderful qualities that enhanced the depth and breath of the dissertation, and I am blessed to have met all of you. Thank you all so much for participating and sharing from the deepest parts of yourselves.

God Bless each and every one of you.

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

ADC Aid to Dependent Children

AFDC Aid to Families with Dependent Children

CD compact disc

CPS Child Protective Services

CRT critical race theory

CWLA Child Welfare League of America

FFA Foster Family Agency

GAO Government Accountability office

ILSP Independent Living Skills Program

IRBPHS Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

JFKU John F. Kennedy University

LVN Licensed Vocational Nurse

PTSD Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

RN/PHN Registered Nurse/Public Health Nurse

SDT self-determination theory

USDHHS U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

CHAPTER I

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Introduction: Statement of the Problem

It is a well-known and vigorously researched fact that in the United States, children of color belonging to various racial, ethnic, and cultural groups are disproportionately overrepresented in the foster-care system. Youths who age out of the foster-care system experience significantly poorer outcomes than Caucasian youths because "the child welfare system has always discriminated against African American children and their families" (Roberts, 2002). Studies show that African American and Native American children in foster care have been subjected to disparate and inequitable treatment on all levels of federal, state, and local governments laws and policies. The overrepresentation of children of color in the social-service systems is linked to social class and economic factors. However, research shows that the average African American child is not at any greater risk for abuse and neglect than the average Caucasian child. (Ards, Myers, Malkis, Sugrue & Zhou 2003; Sedlak & Schultz, 2001).

Nationally, child abuse and neglect allegations are twice as likely to be substantiated for African American and Native American children when compared to Caucasian children, whereas allegations of child abuse and neglect are substantiated at half the rate for Caucasian children as for Pacific Islander children (Child Welfare League of America, [CWLA], 2003). Native American children represent less than 1% of the total child population in the United States, yet 2% of children in foster care were Native Americans whose outcomes are just as poor as those of African American youths (Berger, McDaniel, & Paxson, 2005; Church, 2006; Hill, 2006). Although White children

represented 61% of the total population under the age of 18, they were 38% of the foster-care population. For every 1,000 White children in the U.S. population, 5 were in foster care. For every 1,000 Black children in the U.S. population, 21 were in foster care. African American children represent 15% of the total population under age 18, but were 40% of the foster-care population and stayed longer in foster care (CWLA, 2003; Harris & Hackett, 2008).

African American, Native American, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander children have a disproportionately higher rate of maltreatment investigations when compared to Caucasians **(**Fluke, Yuan, Hedderson, & Curtis, 2002). Disproportionality occurs when a group of children and youth is represented at higher rates at various stages of decision making in the child-welfare system than in the general population (Magruder & Shaw, 2008). Racial disparities are evident at every critical point in child welfare. Reporting agencies such as hospitals report Black women more than White women have newborns who tested positive for drugs; schools make reports to Child Protective Services (CPS) for Black students more frequently than White students and Black families' CPS referrals are substantiated at higher rates than those of White children (Hill, 2005).

Studies show that African American children enter foster care at a higher rate and remain in foster care longer, which contributes to overrepresentation, because the numbers of Black children in care increases in any given year (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, 2007). Studies also found that even when controlling for risk and poverty, in addition to other relevant factors, race affects the decision of whether to provide services or remove children from their families. Although poverty may serve

as an indicator of risk, when race is included, it changes the decision threshold (Hill, 2007).

African American women who aged out of foster care and are living self-sustaining lives are small in number and there is a absence of research on their experiences after leaving care. Although there is a plethora of research on the disproportionate overrepresentation of African American children in the child-welfare system, there is a dearth of research on mature women who are leading productive lives, despite the challenges of being in foster care. Studies show that adolescent girls lack the skills to navigate their independence after emancipation, become pregnant, and end up on welfare, thereby continuing a cycle of CPS involvement for their own child(ren). Some girls resort to prostitution or gang involvement as a means to earn money to support themselves and others become involved with the juvenile-justice system. In California, 67% of females who emancipated from the child-welfare system had at least one child within 5 years of leaving care (Needell et al., 2002).

This study sought to expand current thinking beyond the traditional classifications of success and develop the construction of a comprehensive theory of women's agency to overcome and persevere despite adversity. Success, determined by "normative" standards, embodies the idea that successful individuals have had their psychological, material, and emotional needs met through crucial developmental stages, and were raised in communities that supported their independence. Youths raised in foster care often do not have support, love, stability and acceptance from family members. Many reach the age of majority without their family and often are not mature enough to navigate life responsibly. Daining and DePanfilis (2007) conducted a study to identify personal and

interpersonal factors that contribute to resilience in young adults who emancipated out of foster care. The study explored the relationships between support systems, life stress, and resilience, reflecting key outcomes and found that females, older youth, and youth with lower perceived life stress had higher resilience scores. Resilience was defined as a developmental course characteristic of healthy adjustment, despite the circumstances of considerable hardship.

The lives of African American and other women of color who have emancipated from foster care beyond the age of 30 up to their 60s has received scant attention. The participants' narratives about their individual experiences beyond foster care and the factors that influenced them to strive for achievement of personal goals generated dialogue that could provide a model for current and future foster youths preparing to transition out of foster care.

Background and Need for the Study

Research shows that youths who spent the majority of their formative years in foster care are more likely to experience poorer outcomes than their peers (Bruskas, 2008; Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001). Many are underemployed, earn less than their peers, live below the poverty level, and progress more slowly in the labor market than other youth (George et al., 2002). Jekielek and Brown, (2005) and Scannapieco and Connell-Carrick, (2007) found that many foster youth fail to graduate from high school and have experienced homelessness on at least one occasion (Cook, 1992). A significant number of foster youth suffer from mental illnesses and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Dubner & Motta, 1999; Racusin, Maerlender, Sengupta, Isquith & Straus, 2005). Of youths who emancipated from foster care in

California, 75% will work below grade level, 50% will not complete high school, 45% will be unemployed, and 33% will be arrested; 30% will be on welfare and 25% will be homeless. In 2002, 7%of Californians were African American/Black, but constituted 29% of the dependent children in out-of-home care (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services [USDHHS], 2008a).

Foster children are a population of children who are at risk in general, but youths who age out of the foster-care system when they reach their 18th birthday are at even greater risk. The state, which assumes the role of parent when children are removed from their biological parents, "turns her children out into the street at age 18 with no place to live, no means of supporting themselves, no safety net, and no hope for their future" (Delgado, Fellmeth, Packard, Prosek, & Weichel, 2007). Despite the fact that more than 20,000 youths emancipate from care nationally each year, few empirical studies have followed African American female adolescents into adulthood from their mid-30s to late 60s (USDHHS, 1999). There is little research on the narratives of African American women who were disadvantaged as children, survived the trauma of foster care, and today are living self-sustaining lives. This study will contribute to the few studies conducted on the experiences of women of color who are mature and were formerly in foster care.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions, challenges, and lived experiences of mature women formerly in foster care, in their own voices. The factors that influenced the development of life-sustaining skills in overcoming the challenges of being in foster care were also explored. For the purpose of this dissertation, life-

sustaining skills are defined as being gainfully employed with the ability to support oneself and family; ability to manage finances, write checks and pay bills; adequate housing or home ownership; planned pregnancies; no involvement with law enforcement; and development of social skills.

There is some research on the experiences of women of color pursuing educational goals (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Byars & Hackett, 1996; Fitzgerald, Fassinger, & Betz, 1995), but little research has specifically identified issues and experiences of African American women who were in care in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. There is much that can be learned from the narratives of women who have survived and prevailed despite foster care. This study identified resiliency and strategies that led to accomplishment of personal goals, the development of life-sustaining skills, and current life satisfaction. The following questions informed the study.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. What factors influenced the motivation, perseverance, and development of life-sustaining skills?
2. What personal and interpersonal influences contributed to subjective well-being after emancipating from foster care and into adulthood?
3. What were the factors that contributed to life achievements, accomplishment of goals, and subjective well-being?

The interview questions had five subsections that covered participant's (a) personal background; (b) home life before entry into foster care, foster care experiences, and emancipation from foster care; (c) postemancipation, support systems,

mentors, educational goals, and employment; (d) adulthood, personal development, and achievement of goals; and (e) personal and interpersonal relationships, reconnecting with family members, and faith and spirituality.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework applied to this qualitative study of mature women formerly in foster care was critical race theory (CRT), using a *narrative* approach. CRT was a fitting context in which to explore the intersections of race, gender, the child-welfare system, and the impact on the lives of former and current youth. CRT names and discusses the daily realities of racism and exposes how racism continues to privilege White people and to disadvantage people of color. CRT also legitimates and promotes the voices of people of color by using storytelling to integrate experiential knowledge drawn from a shared history as "the other" into critiques of dominant social orders. Early CRT held that the experiences of African Americans constituted the paradigm by which race and its redress must be conceptualized and enacted (Bell, 1973, Freeman, 1978).

CRT was written by a diverse group of legal scholars of color who questioned the foundation of the liberal order, and asserted that the law is built on binary opposition, revealing its instability, upon interrogation. The law, as understood by critical legal studies scholars and practitioners, was a political process that produced socioeconomic privilege for the dominant culture. CRT scholars placed the civil rights movement into a broader context that includes economics, history, group and self-interest, feelings, and the unconscious. CRT critiques liberalism with the notion that meaningful social change can occur without radical change to existing social structures (Edwards & Schmidt, 2006). Bell is the intellectual founder of CRT, but the late Freeman also made significant

contributions to the CRT movement with a piece that documented how the U.S. Supreme Court's race jurisprudence, even when seemingly liberal in thrust, nevertheless legitimized racism (Delgado & Stefancic, (2001).

CRT contains an activist dimension that not only attempts to understand our social situation, but tries to change it. It attempts to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies in an effort to change it for the better (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT builds on the insights of two previous movements: critical legal studies and radical feminism. The United States has oppressed African American women and the Black race as a whole, and for much of its history, extreme racial oppression, segregation, and slavery have underlaid the foundation of this country (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972; Feagin, 2010; Wise, 2008).

Laws passed by Congress and implemented by child-welfare agencies continue to negatively impact children and families of color across the nation (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972). Historically, welfare and race were routinely linked to politicians employing code terms that thinly camouflaged overt racism. The racialized gender politics of welfare have yielded reforms that subordinate women of color disproportionately, both ideologically and in their practical effects (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972; Roberts, 2002).

Feminist legal scholars challenged the laws' deeply inscribed patriarchy; they showed that gender and sex roles are constructed, not natural, and named and condemned such practices (Johnson, 1994). Critical race theorists also challenged the laws' dominant mode of detached impartiality, but offered in its place scholarship that is more contextualized and based on narrative experiences. Many CRT writers believed that a

major stumbling block to racial reform is that the dominant culture's mindset is invested in continuing to believe the negative stereotypes of African Americans and people of color in the United States (Johnson, 1994).

CRT writers employ parables, narratives, and "counterstories" to analyze and displace myths and stereotypes of African Americans and women. Professors Farber and Sherry, two legal scholars opposed to CRT, claimed that CRT is totally unrealistic and unworkable and is not legal scholarship, but did concede that stories told by the oppressed may have special value because such stories tend to build solidarity and a sense of community among members of the oppressed group (as cited in Johnson, 1998).

The narrative approach is powerful because it is not linear or logical, but requires readers to employ a different interpretive heuristic that places them in active or interactive roles. Narrative attempts to situation readers in the context of the story by involving them in the events related by the story, rather than convincing them of the researcher's conclusions (Johnson, 1998).

According to Bruner (1987), there is a distinction between a life as lived, a life as experienced, and a life as told:

> A life is what actually happens. A life experienced consists of the images, feelings, sentiments, desires, thoughts, and meanings known to a person whose life it is. … a life as told, a life history, Is a narrative, influenced by the cultural conventions of telling, by the audience, and by the social context.

Personal experience narratives are "stories people tell about their personal experience" and "have a beginning, middle and end" (Denzin, 1989; Dolby-Stahl, 1985; Stahl, 1977, p. 7). When stories are told, they create an emotional bond between listener and teller and "express a part of the 'inner life' of the storyteller" (Dolby-Stahl, 1985, p. 7). Personal-experience narratives may be told only to another individual (Denzin, 1989). A key

element of narrative research is to understand the individual's past, present, and future. By focusing on the individual's experiences, information is elicited and the researcher uses a chronology of events to tell the story participants want to convey.

The participants in this study had to overcome social, psychosocial, psychological, emotional, and adversity to survive foster care. McAdams (2001) and Singer (2004) posited that life stories bring together one's memories of the past and their hopes for their future life that would provide a degree of unity, meaning, and purpose. Recent research suggests that life stories may contain developmental scripts that sometimes suggests a trajectory similar to Erikson's (1950) theory of development Wilt, Cox & McAdams, 2010).

CRT allowed me, as the researcher, to analyze the construction of race as a common experience of African Americans women who were in foster care using a narrative approach. The core of narrative inquiry combines a philosophical stance toward the nature of social reality and our relationship with it and the model in which it should be studied.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

Some delimiting factors in this study are the sample size, gender, race, and ages of the participants, and the demographic area. The researcher chose six mature women, five of whom were African American and one Mexican American, who aged out of foster care and agreed to participate in this study. The location of the study was in the East Bay in Oakland, California. All participants worked in the same demographic area, and the location was convenient for everyone. Participants were chosen for this study because all

were identified as former foster youths or were raised by adults other than their parents. Another delimiting factor is that participants were well known to me. The participants' retelling of events they had not spoken about to anyone outside their family elicited emotional responses from memories that were painful for some to recall. I attempted to recruit 10 mature women for this study, but four were disqualified because they did not meet the predetermined criteria. Therefore, only six women participated in the study.

Limitations

Researcher bias was a limitation in this study. I am a middle-aged African American woman who is a child-welfare worker employed by a social-services agency in Oakland, California. An additional limiting factor was that I had a professional relationship with each of the participants in this study. Another limiting factor was that participants were employees at the same agency as me. I did not include African American men or White women who were in foster care. I also did not include participants who were not involved in the foster-care system.

Significance of the Study

This study brought a positive contribution to the field of child welfare, but also focused attention on the strengths and perseverance of women who defied the odds of foster care. This study focused on the child-welfare system's disparate treatment of children of color, which, studies show, has been partially responsible for the poor outcomes for children in foster care. Foster care, which is meant to be a temporary intervention to protect children from abusive and neglectful families, has failed many of its children by allowing large numbers of African American children to languish in foster care until they "age out," unprepared to live and assume the responsibilities of an adult.

Although child-welfare practices and policies are beginning to address issues of bleak outcomes for youths who have emancipated from foster care, studies exploring the lives of women who exited foster care and who are leading productive lives is scant. Research that is reflective of all minorities, and sensitive to the resilience of low-income families is needed, using multilevel, multimethod analytic techniques. Therefore, although this study focused on the foster-care system, and the disproportionate numbers of African American children in foster care, it provided a verbal platform for participants who aged out of foster care. Participants shared their experiences with the intention of providing hope for current and former foster youth and to inspire them to succeed in spite of their foster care experience. The narratives of participants in this study are invaluable in bringing to light characteristics that enabled them to overcome challenging odds and provide insights into why some former foster youth succeed and others do not.

Definition of Terms

The following are terms were used throughout this study and are listed here to clarify their meanings. Terms associated with the foster-care system were taken directly from the *Welfare and Institutions Code Manual* (1997/2007). Additional terms came from a variety of sources in this study.

Aging out: Aging out is the process of a youth transitioning from the foster-care system to independent living.

Child Protective Services (CPS): CPS workers intervene on behalf of children who are in danger of maltreatment, or have been abused or neglected by their parents or caretakers. Children are typically removed from situations in which maltreatment has been substantiated.

Children of color: African American, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian children are those who are non-White and are disproportionately represented in child welfare in different parts of the country.

Dependent child: Minors adjudicated under Section 300 of the California Welfare and Institutions code statutes are known as dependent children of the juvenile court and are supervised by the county's Department of Children and Family Services.

Disparity: Described as the differential treatment or services provided to minorities, compared to the services provided to comparable non-minorities.

Disproportionality: The term is used to identify a broader concept of the problem and refers to a situation in which a particular racial/ethnic group of children are represented at a higher percentage than other racial/ethnic groups.

Emancipation: Foster youth are emancipated from care when they reach the age of majority at 18 years. Funding to pay for the child's placement is terminated by the agency, and dependency is dismissed by the juvenile court.

Foster care: Foster care is the provision of 24-hour care and supervision for children removed from their parents and placed in one of the following types of foster homes: a licensed foster-family home; a family home certified by a the county or through a Foster Family Agency (FFA) that contracts with the county to keep its children in their FFA homes; a licensed group home for children 13 and older; a relative other than the child's parent or guardian pursuant to a court order and if the relative home has been approved by the county.

Institutional racism: Institutional racism occurs in institutions and is discriminatory treatment, unfair policies and practices, and inequitable opportunities and impacts, based on race.

Kinship care: The full-time care, nurturing, and protection of children by relatives. Two types of kinship care are recognized: *informal* (arrangements made privately between family members) and *formal* (there is court intervention and involvement in the child-welfare system).

Life satisfaction: An appraisal of the overall conditions of one's life that can also be viewed as the way in which a balance between the individual and social system are attained.

Life-sustaining skills: The ability to obtain and stay employed; the motivation to complete high school and enroll in and graduate from community college or a 4-year university; the wherewithal to conduct one's life responsibly by maintaining a legal residence, having creditworthiness, being trustworthy and honest; no involvement with law enforcement and engaging in responsible family planning.

Mature women: Women who are fully developed in body, emotions, mind, and spirit. They are responsible, have had many life experiences that shaped who they are today, and have an innate sense of self-worth.

Oppression: Oppression is the arbitrary and cruel exercise of power. The term is used to describe wrongful acts of government. Oppression is most commonly felt and expressed by a widespread, if unconscious, assumption that a certain class and/or group of people are inferior. Oppression is often used to mean a certain group is being kept down by force or authority and has been referred to as "systemic oppression."

Oppressors: Any governmental agencies and individuals who unfairly and unjustly treat African Americans and other ethnically diverse people of color differently, keep them down, coerce them, repress them, and perceive them as different and "less than."

Out-of-home care: The placement of children outside of the home of their biological family. Out-of-home placement includes foster homes, group homes, and residential treatment facilities for those children who are severely emotionally disturbed.

Overrepresentation: Often used in reference to African American children—has traditionally been used to define the high numbers of children of color in the child-welfare system that is larger than their proportion in the general population (Children and Family Research Center, 2002).

Racial microaggressions: Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color.

Racism: The belief that race is the primary determinant of human capacities, that a certain race is inherently superior or inferior to others and/or that individuals should be treated differently according to their racial designation. Racism is a form of oppression.

Resilience: Successful adaptation or absence of a pathological outcome following exposure to stressful or potentially traumatic life events or life circumstances.

Structural racism: Bias across institutions and society. The cumulative and compounded effects of an array of oppressions on disadvantaged people of color.

Subjective well-being: An evaluation of one's life assessed by measures of global life satisfaction, frequency of positive affect, and frequency of negative affect. Subjective well-being has a affective (emotional) and cognitive (judgmental) component.

Systemic bias: Due to racially different treatment at various stages of decision-making processes of the child-welfare system.

Systemic racism: Policies and practices that have disparate adverse effects on people of color; these include overt and covert treatment, conscious and unconscious bias, intentional and unintentional bias, and structural (or systemic) discrimination manifested by cultural insensitivity.

Summary

All youths, and specifically African American girls who age out of the foster-care system, face overwhelming challenges. Many fail to survive the onslaught of adulthood without crippling consequences. The outlooks and outcomes for Black children in foster care are dismal at best, and research on the lives of African American women after they reach adulthood into their 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s is scant. Historically, the foster-care system has engaged in discriminatory, racist practices against women and children in a climate of oppression and disparity that is deeply entrenched. The obstacles that youths face after aging out of care are significant. Emancipation from foster care for young African American women in the past 2 decades continues to be bleak. However, the narratives, reflections, and experiences of participants was an important addition to the literature on outcomes of children in the foster-care system. Current and former foster youth continue to face poverty, homelessness, mental health problems, involvement with juvenile justice, prostitution, and early pregnancies. Follow-up on the educational

challenges foster youths face has improved, but many foster children have not had their educational needs adequately met.

Adolescent girls who aged out of foster care from the 1950s through the 1990s are now mature women, yet there is scant research on their journey to adulthood. Little is known about their experiences in foster care and what constitutes their lives years after emancipation. Studies examining youths' experience after aging out of foster care reveal that African American and Native American adolescents have poorer outcomes in virtually every aspect of their lives. Documenting the lives of foster-care alum who have survived the foster-care system and defied the odds will fill a gap in the literature and begin to generate dialogue about the influences and strategies used to overcome the deficits of foster care. The narratives and reflections of mature women of color who survived foster care are an understudied phenomenon, and future research should further investigate the variables and influences that shaped their desire to succeed.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature was designed to lead to a clear understanding of the factors that contributed to the development of life-sustaining skills for mature women formerly in foster care. However, the current and ongoing issue of disproportionality in child welfare was included, as the issues of race in the United States and the child-welfare system continue to impact youths in foster care. This chapter explored race, class, and gender in the child-welfare system. The issue of racism in the child-welfare system and the impact on foster children has been acknowledged, researched, and studied by federal, state, and local governmental agencies, but little has been done to actively implement changes in the way the child-welfare system works with families of color, specifically African American families. The literature examined included federal policies through the lens of CRT to enhance knowledge about the causes, processes, and outcomes of racial disproportionality in child welfare.

Youths of color who aged out of foster care have such poor outcomes that the issues has been examined by researchers, scholars, governmental agencies, and the child-welfare system itself. The research shows that disproportionality and disparate treatment of African American children is an "intractable problem with roots and contributing factors far too complex and complicated for child welfare systems to address" (Miller & Ward, 2008).

There are few research studies on older African American women and other persons of color who aged out of foster care, exploring factors that contributed to their success after emancipation. The factors that contributed to their survival and resilience in

spite of foster care, with few, if any resources, is a major accomplishment. The literature on narratives of African American and Hispanic women is scarce, and researchers have mostly avoided examining factors contributing to a successful transition to adulthood after emancipation. The literature reviewed for this paper found, without exception, narratives from women of color in the academy, but very little on African American women formerly in foster care.

The first section of this chapter reviews literature on the historical background of the child-welfare system in the United States and California, and foster care and kinship foster care. The second section of this chapter discusses theories related to the research questions through the theoretical frameworks of CRT, resiliency, and self-determination theory. The third section reviews studies on narrative theory.

Historical Background of Child Welfare

A review of the literature on the child-welfare system showed that child-welfare services were designed to protect children who have suffered physical or sexual abuse, neglect, or were at risk for maltreatment, if left in the parent's home. The purpose of the child-welfare system is to improve the conditions in the home and bring stability to the families whose children were removed by CPS. Services include preserving families in crisis while ensuring the safety of the children in the home, or removal of children from the familial home on a temporary basis, if the child-welfare worker perceived that the parents were unable to keep children safe in the home.

Historically, child-welfare services began as a function of private agencies that later developed as a responsibility of state and local governments. The Administration for Children and Families (2011) was created by USDHHS as a principal operating division

in 1991 to promote policies that favored religious right conservative elements. The child-welfare system is a relatively new phenomenon, and states have significant latitude in the delivery of child-welfare services. Each state has its own legal and administrative structures and programs and there are variations in the definition of what constitutes child abuse and neglect. Each state has its own standards about when to intervene in family life, and the nature of the intervention is taken into consideration. Discussion of the prevalent issues in child welfare and race begin with Americans' perceptions about race. In the United States, race is a factor in most aspects of life, and particularly in the child-welfare system.

Race as a Social Construct in Child Welfare

According to Feagin (2006), early on, "racism in America was founded on our forefathers' conception that people of African descent were racially inferior; were natural slaves; were less intelligent and oversexed;, ugly, lazy, and smelled funny" (p. 7). Negative stereotypes continue to dominate White Americans' conceptions of Black people today. Feagin concluded that racism is so deeply embedded in America's structure that it will take a new, different approach to conceptualize a White racial frame that transcends traditional theories of racism and its root causes in the United States. Racist ideas emerged from slaveholders and their associates and was constantly supported and controlled by Whites who controlled major institutions, including the economy, law, politics, education, and religion, and ultimately the child-welfare system (Feagin, 2006).

The concept of race is a social construct and the complexities regarding race in the United States are little understood by those who belong to the dominant culture. Sociologists have researched unemployment and poverty, disparities in accumulated

wealth, segregation and Black–White relationships but ignored the social psychological phenomena and how those meanings came to guide patterns of relations among individuals of particular groups (Bobo & Fox, 2003). Bonilla-Silva (2010) agreed that race is a social-construct category that "means the notions of racial difference are human creations rather than eternal, essential categories" (p. 8).

Bonilla-Silva (2010) further posited that there are three distinct variations on how social scientists approach the constructionist perspective on race: (a) race is socially constructed and therefore is not a fundamental category of analysis and praxis; (b) sociologists give verbal expression to the social constructionist view, but lack conviction, writing a line in the beginning of an article or book, then proceeding to discuss "racial" differences in academic achievement, crime, and SAT scores as if they were truly racial; and (c) concludes that "this is the central way in which contemporary scholars contribute to the propagation of racist interpretations of racial inequality"(p. 8). Bonilla-Silva (2010) admitted using the third approach, which acknowledges race, as other social categories such as class and gender, are constructed but have a *social* reality, which means, after race, class, or gender is created, it produces real effects on the actors racialized as Black or White. Although race is unstable, it has a "changing same quality at its core" (pp. 8–9).

Race, racism, and discrimination are mechanisms of hierarchical differentiations that shape the ordering of social relations and the allocation of life experiences and chances (Zuberi, 2001). Social constructionists claim that the concept of race is a pseudo-biological concept that has been used to justify and rationalize the unequal treatment of groups of people by others (Machery & Faucher, 2005). Race and ethnicity are social

categories that have been embedded in American law throughout U.S. history, yet, in reference to human beings, *race* first appeared in English literature in the 16th century as a classification meaning similar to "kind" or "type" as in "race of saints" (Alland, 1971).

Racial struggles at the beginning of the 20th century were shaped by the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) in which the Court legally sanctioned the segregation of Blacks and Whites through the enforcement of the "one-drop" rule. The decision had a tremendous impact politically and socially, instituting the "separate but equal" doctrine, and set the stage for what became the basis of Jim Crow laws. Those laws enforced racial segregation in all public spaces in the South and justified non-institutional forms of segregation in the northern and western states (Neubeck & Cavenez, 2001).

Researchers have theorized about race, but have not comprehensively examined systemic racism and the impact on African Americans and most people of color. Though research suggests the perspective of White America's attitudes toward African Americans have changed, there is little evidence to show that sociologists have fully applied a CRT framework to understand the contemporary manifestations of gendered racism in the child-welfare system.

Federal Role in the Child-Welfare System

Throughout the history of the United States, government interventions on behalf of children needing protection from abusive parents has evolved according to the beliefs and attitudes about what government's role should be for child protection. Pubic awareness about child abuse and the damage it caused grew, and the importance of child protection received greater attention by government officials (Abramovitz, 1988). Under

the U.S. Constitution, the federal role in child welfare was limited, but the federal government's role in the modern child-welfare system has increased as federal funding is accompanied by new rules and requirements emphasizing greater accountability on the part of states in achieving positive child outcomes (Abramovitz, 1988).

No federal or state programs existed in the 20th century to provide public assistance to poor families, irrespective of their race. The aid that existed was quite limited and economic hardship was considered to be a personal matter rather than a public issue. Forty percent of the population in the United States lived in poverty and the plight of the poor was not viewed as a problem requiring government intervention (Neubeck & Cavenez, 2001). Women rearing their children alone faced many hardships and it was not uncommon for poor mothers to give their children up for adoption, to foster homes, or to orphanages because they had no way to adequately provide for their most basic needs (Abramovitz,1988; Neubeck & Cavenez, 2001).

During the Progressive Era (1890–1920), the well-being of children of impoverished parents was cause for concern of many social reformers, who argued that financial assistance to deserving needy mothers was the responsibility of the government (Neubeck & Cavenez, 2001). Shortly thereafter, the 1909 White House Conference on Dependent Children created political activism that pressured state legislatures to pass bills to establish "Mothers' Pensions" (Downs, Moore, McFadden, Machaud, & Costin, 2004).

Child-welfare services were designed to protect children who suffered physical or sexual abuse, neglect, or were at risk for maltreatment if left in the parents' home. The purpose of the child-welfare system is to improve the conditions in the home and bring

stability to the families whose children were removed by CPS (Neubeck & Cavenez, 2001). Services include preserving families in crisis while ensuring the safety of the children in the home, or removal from the familial homes on a temporary basis, if the Child Welfare Worker perceived that the parents were unable to keep children safe in the home (Neubeck & Cavenez, 2001).

Federal Assistance Programs

The Mothers' Pension Movement

The mothers' pension program was implemented after the 1909 White House Conference primarily so that mothers could stay home with their children and exert a moral influence over them. State legislatures passed the bills endorsed by the Mothers' Pension Movement in 1934. However, most of the states that enacted the program did not provide any funding to local communities, so very few women with children actually received financial assistance (Downs et al., 2004; Neubeck & Cavenez, 2001). The amount of aid provided to mothers was so small that many had to supplement their incomes by working at low-paying jobs (Abramovitz, 1988; Neubeck & Cavenez, 2001).

African American mothers were excluded from receiving mothers' pensions in the southern states. African American women were routinely denied aid because welfare workers found their homes "unsuitable" and felt that Black mothers were incapable of meeting the criteria (Abramovitz, 1988). The everyday acceptance of the racist culture accommodated the acceptance of welfare racism.

The Social Security Act of 1935

The Social Security Act of 1935 authorized the first federal grants for child-welfare services, under what later became Subpart 1 of Title IV-B of the Social Security

Act. Federal grants served as an impetus for states to establish child-welfare agencies and develop programs to deliver child-welfare services. The definition of child-welfare services was expanded to include a broader range of services. Federal funding for child-welfare services increased, and states were required to match federal grants with state funds.

Aid to Dependent Children

The original Social Security Act also created the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program in order to help states provide financial assistance to needy dependent children. In 1962, the program was renamed Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) then replaced by Temporary Assistance to Needy Families in the 1950s. Federal policy makers became aware that many families that had needy children were denied ADC benefits because welfare agencies denied payments made on behalf of children of unwed mothers and other parents whose behavior was deemed immoral. The children received no follow-up services, despite their established need for financial assistance. As with the mothers' pension programs, ADC programs discriminated against African American families with little discussion from members of Congress (Downs et al., 2004).

The Social Security Act was amended in 1961 to create the Foster Care component of ADC. The amendment limited federal funding in cases where the child might have received ADC payments had he remained in home with his parent. AFDC has its roots in the amendment today (Murray & Gesiriech, 2004).

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (Public Law 96-272)

During the 1970s, lawmakers became concerned as increasingly large numbers of African American children were being removed from their homes unnecessarily, and

once removed, were not returned to their parents' home. Concerns were also raised about the lack of oversight of foster homes, and few efforts were made to reunify children with their parents or place them in adoptive homes. Congress enacted the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 that created Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, and transferred AFDC-Foster Care to the new title.

The current child-welfare system is founded on the Adoption Assistance an Child Welfare Act of 1980., and established permanency planning and foster-care placement reviews; required states to develop a state plan detailing how child-welfare services would be delivered; required states to make "reasonable efforts" to keep families together by providing prevention and family reunification services; created an adoption-assistance program; and created the first significant role for the court system, requiring courts to review child-welfare cases on a regular basis. Despite these efforts, disproportionality continues to affect children of color and their families who are involved in the child-welfare system. Essentially, little has changed in decades.

The following section discusses studies on kinship care, to provide a framework of legislative and regulatory practices and the factors that influence success or failure of placement with relative/kin as a substitute for foster care.

Foster and Kinship Care

The child-welfare system began to recognize Black children in the 1930s when services shifted from institutions to foster care and from private to public agencies (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972). Indigent, immigrant children from abusive and neglectful parents were "rescued" and placed in orphanages, but Black children were excluded. The orphanages founded by wealthy White patrons accepted 711 White

children but Black children were sent to inferior and overcrowded “colored orphan asylums.” The remaining orphanages accepted all other non-White children (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972). Even though there have been some changes in the foster-care system, issues of disparate treatment of Black children continues to be a problem and appears to be systemic nationwide.

Twenty years ago, there were an estimated half-million children placed in foster care (Shyne & Schroeder, 1978), the majority of them African American or children of color (Hill, 2007). Many of the children remained in foster care for long periods of time, drifting from placement to placement (Fanshel & Shinn, 1978). Professionals were concerned about the lack of continuity of care for the children in care (Goldstein, Freud, & Soinit, 1973). There was also growing acknowledgement that the children needed a stable living arrangement for their well-being (Goldstein et al., 1973).

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (Public Law 96-272) introduced permanency planning as an important piece of legislation to maintain children in their own homes or place them as quickly as possible in permanent homes with relatives or other families (Pecora, Whitaker, Maluccio, Barth, & Plotkin, 1992). Each state enacted laws to carry out mandatory requirements to receive federal funds for child-welfare services (Pecora, Whittaker, Maluccio, Barth, & Plotkin, 1992). However, implementation of the law has not been enacted because adequate funding has not been forthcoming from the federal government (Pecora et al., 1992). Permanency Planning was not financially supported by staff training, supervision, or resources. The goal has not been met. However billions of dollars are spent annually to maintain children in foster care instead of investing in efforts to prevent or shorten placement (U,S.

Department of Health and Human Services 2009). When the law was initially enacted, out-of-home care decreased dramatically, but began to rise again after only a few years.

Youths who age out of the foster-care system experience significantly poorer outcomes than White youths because "the child welfare system has always discriminated against African American children and their families" (Roberts, 2002**)**. Studies show that African American and Native American children in foster care have been subjected to disparate and inequitable treatment on all levels of federal, state, and local governments laws and policies. The overrepresentation of children of color in the social-service systems is linked to social class and economic factors. However, research shows that the average African American child is not at any greater risk for abuse and neglect than the average Caucasian child (Ards et al., 2003; Sedlak & Schultz, 2001).

Nationally, child abuse and neglect allegations are twice as likely to be substantiated for African American and Native American children compared to Caucasian children, whereas allegations of child abuse and neglect are substantiated at half the rate of Caucasian children for Pacific Islander children, (CWLA, 2003). Native American children represent less than 1%of the total child population in the United States, yet 2% of children in foster care were Native American whose outcomes are just as poor as those of African American youths (Berger et al., 2005; Church, 2006; Hill, 2006).

Although White children represented 61% of the total population under the age of 18, they were 38% of the foster-care population. For every 1,000 White child in the U.S. population, 5 were in foster care. For every 1,000 African American/Black children in the U.S. population, 21 were in foster care. African American children represent 15% of the

total population under age 18, but they were 40% of the foster care population and stayed longer in foster care (CWLA, 2003; Harris & Hackett, 2008).

African American, Native American, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander children have a disproportionately higher rate of maltreatment investigations when compared to Caucasian children **(**Fluke et al., 2002). Disproportionality occurs when a group of children and youth is represented at higher rates at various stages of decision making in the child-welfare system than in the general population (Magruder & Shaw, 2008). Racial disparities are evident at every critical point in child welfare. Reporting agencies such as hospitals report Black women more than White women have their newborns test positive for drugs; schools make reports to CPS for Black students more frequently than White students and Black families' CPS referrals are substantiated at higher rates than those of White children (Hill, 2005).

Studies show that African American children enter foster care at a higher rate and remain in foster care longer, which contributes to overrepresentation because the numbers of Black children in care increases in any given year (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, 2007). Studies also found that even when controlling for risk and poverty, in addition to other relevant factors, race affects the decision about whether to provide services or remove children from their families. Although poverty may serve as an indicator of risk, when race is included, it changes the decision threshold (Hill, 2007).

Research shows that youths who spent the majority of their formative years in foster care are more likely to experience poorer outcomes than their peers (Bruskas, 2008; Courtney et al., 2001). Many are underemployed, earn less than their peers, live below the poverty level, and progress more slowly in the labor market than other youth

(George et al., 2002). Jekielek and Brown, (2005) and Scannapieco and Connell-Carrick, (2007) found that many foster youth fail to graduate from high school and have experienced homelessness on at least one occasion (Cook, 1992). A significant number of foster youth suffer from mental illnesses and PTSD (Dubner & Motta, 1999; Racusin et al, 2005). Of the youths who emancipated from foster care in California, 75% will work below grade level; 50% will not complete high school; 45% will be unemployed, and 33% will be arrested; 30% will be on welfare and 25% will be homeless. In 2002, 7% of Californians were African American/Black, but constituted 29% of the dependent children in out-of-home care (USDHHS, 2008b).

Despite the fact that over 20,000 youths emancipate from care nationally each year, few empirical studies have followed African American female adolescents into adulthood from their mid-30s to their late 60s. The next section reviews literature on kinship care and the impact on African American families and children.

Foster/Kinship Care in California

A review of the literature shows that California has the largest child welfare system in the country. One in five children is a ward of the child-welfare system (Administration for Children and Families, 1996). California's rate of infant first entries is approximately three times the rate for children of other ages (Berrick, Needell, & Barth, 1995; Needell & Barth, 1998). African American children are disproportionately represented among children removed from their homes and placed in foster care. In 1988, 38% of children in foster care were African American. In 1997, African American children represented 33% of children in care (Needell & Barth, 1998). California data on first entries by age and ethnicity reveal that 24% of African American children were 1

year old when placed in foster care compared to about 18% of White children and 17% of Hispanic children (Needell et al., 2002). California has more children in relative/kinship care than other states and kinship care is used more often as a placement option. African American children were the largest group of children in kinship homes whereas Caucasian children were the largest group in foster homes (Berrick, Frasch, & Fox, 2000).

Kinship care has rapidly accelerated in California in recent years. Policy makers, practitioners, and researchers began to recognize that large numbers of African American children were placed with relatives. A recent study found that among all states reporting the use of kin as foster-care providers, over 31% were placed with relatives (Kusserow, 1992). African American children are almost twice as likely as White children to be placed with kin and kinship care is used disproportionately for African American children (Harris, 1999, 2004; Minkler & Fuller-Thomsom, 1999). There are few studies on quality of care in foster care for children placed in the care of relatives. An empirical study examining quality of kinship care found certain similarities and differences in the children, the caregivers, and the characteristics of homes and neighborhoods in kin and non-kin settings. Caregivers in the study believed the children in their homes were less traumatized by their past experiences from children in foster homes (Berrick, 1997). Berrick et al. (1995) found that kin caregivers rated the behaviors and that children with emotional problems were perceived as less problematic. Both studies relied upon caregivers' ratings of the children in their care.

In California, the growth in kinship placement is the predominant placement setting for children, surpassing foster-family care (Berrick, 1997). Kinship care as a

foster-care resource was initiated when *Miller v Youakim* Supreme Court (1979) ruled that kin could not be excluded from the definition of foster parents and that under some conditions, kin might be eligible for federal IV-E foster-care benefits.

Research on kinship care is scarce, and until recently, few studies were available that focused on the characteristics of kin providers or on the children in their care. There were few studies that addressed the services provided to kin through the child-welfare system, or the kin providers' perspective of their roles (Berrick, 1997). Thornton (1987) researched the characteristics of kin caregivers and described them as older than foster parents; single women of color who were struggling with limited resources. Another study found that maternal grandmothers reported poor health and depression (Kelley, 1993). Some studies also pointed to the challenges providers faced with little preparation or planning (Kennedy & Keeney, 1987; LeProhn, 1994; Thornton, 1987).

Studies on child characteristics in kinship care share some similarities with other youth in foster care, but children in kinship care had higher rates of asthma, anemia, and vision and dental problems (Dubowitz et al., 1994). Children in kinship care also exhibited greater behavioral problems and many were found to be diagnosed with higher rates of physical and mental health problems (Fein, Mallucio, & Kluger, 1990).

A longitudinal study on placement histories of 484 children in kinship care in San Diego County, California indicated that children in kinship care have markedly different socio-demographic and maltreatment histories, in addition to heterogeneous placement experiences (Leslie, Landsverk, Horton, Ganger, & Newton, 2000). The study identified several distinct groupings of children in kinship care and suggested a methodology for examination of placement experiences. The study concluded that placement experiences

for children in kinship care were more accurately characterized by a longitudinal perspective that relates types of placements with placement pathways (Leslie et al., 2000). The study found that children fall into three subgroups based on most restrictive placements that include that the child had no experience in foster care; children placed in foster care and later placed with relative; and children with histories of placements in residential-treatment facilities or psychiatric hospitals (Leslie et al., 2000).

A study on the benefits and challenges of children in kinship and foster care was conducted using a sample of 18 African American adolescents ages 11to 14. The study explored the differences in the relationships of kinship and foster--care experiences. Researchers concluded that stability of family relationships exhibited stronger connections to people and places than those in non-kinship placements. However, the complexity of their relationships with caregivers and birth parents added to the dynamics in the relationship as a result of these connections (Schwartz, 2008). Continuing contact with birthparents may result in some degree of role reversal for youth who may struggle with the desire to care for parents who cannot care for themselves or with other relative caregivers who may be older and have health problems (Schwartz, 2008). O'Donnell (1999) found that social workers seldom worked to involve the birth fathers of children in kinship care and were not interested enough to reach out to them.

Kinship Care in Northern British Columbia

An exploratory case study on kinship care in northern British Columbia interviewed kinship caregivers and social workers and reviewed files to identify the needs of kinship caregivers (Burke & Schmidt, 2009). The case study found that kinship caregivers were stretched by their roles in fulfilling duties and providing day-to-day care

for the children, but also working with social workers and the child's parents. Their own personal lives took a backseat and their health and well-being were directly impacted by the level of care the children needed. The caregivers in the study were older, had a lower level of education, were single, were in fair or poor health, and had a lower than average income (Berrrick, 1997). All of the caregivers needed additional support such as respite and funding for children's activities, which cost the caregivers money. Whether an increase in pay or increased services, support was an important issue for caregivers. Social workers' time and training were perceived as beneficial and helpful.

Summary

This section of the literature reviewed studies on foster and kinship care. The conclusions indicate that kinship care is considered the "least restrictive" and "in the best interest of the child." However concerns were raised regarding lack of service to relatives, poor outcomes for children, and inadequate monitoring of children in the care of kin. In California, kinship-placement homes are primarily African American, and research on overall functioning and outcomes appear to be bleak in many instances. Relatives are not provided necessary resources that would assist them and social workers do not inform them that assistance is available. The rate of payment kin receive is much lower than is afforded to foster homes and keeping a child often becomes a financial burden. Relatives do not know who to ask for assistance when children exhibit behavioral problems, therefore, children don't thrive well in relative placement, as previously reported. Although placing children with kin was presumed to be in their best interest, the children receive inadequate services from the child-welfare system.

Disproportionality in Foster Care

Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972) researched the overrepresentation of African American children left to languish in foster care decades before prominent scholars began to study the phenomenon. Their study examined the overrepresentation of African American children in foster care and concluded that "disproportionality was primarily due to institutional racism and America's treatment of its black children in the foster care system was racist and morally wrong" (p. 34). Hill (2006) reviewed the literature on the scope and nature of disproportionality in child welfare and found that African American children's experiences differed from those of Caucasian children at all system decision points except reentry into foster care. Hill (2006) also found that White people believed that Black overrepresentation in foster care was primarily due to high rates of abuse and neglect in Black families, and that poverty, not race, was the reason for the overrepresentation of Black children.

Hill (2006) found systemic bias resulted in disparate treatment at various stages of decision making process in the child-welfare system, and argued that systemic racism has increased. Policies and practices have had an adverse affect on people of color. Systemic racism goes from overt to covert in treatment; conscious to unconscious; intentional to unintentional; structural or (systemic) discrimination and is often manifested by cultural insensitivity.

The Children's Bureau (2003) sponsored an exploratory qualitative study of the child-welfare system's response to concerns about the overrepresentation of Black children in the foster-care system. Few studies have considered the child-welfare community's perception on overrepresentation or the manner in which agencies are

responding to overrepresentation. The findings from the study revealed that participants' perceptions of why children of color were overrepresented in the child-welfare system was due to poverty; the need for services, but lack of resources; visibility of minority impoverished families in other systems; lack of resources available to minority families to negotiate the child-welfare system; the vulnerability of African American communities; overreporting of minority parents for child abuse and neglect; pressure of the media; lack of experience with other cultures; and defining abusive behavior.

Additional themes that emerged regarding the influence of federal policy found that although agency administrators were familiar with policies on Multi-ethnic Placement Act and the Adoption and Safe Families Act, supervisors and direct service workers were not familiar with policies and were confused about implementation. Shortened timelines imposed on social workers by Adoption and Safe Families Act policy was a source of concern, in addition to limited resources.

A review of the literature found that for years, racial disparities existed throughout the entire process in the child-welfare system in Minnesota. African American children were five times more likely to be placed out of home; families were 80% more likely to be reported for neglect as opposed to 64% for Caucasian children; and children were twice as likely to enter foster care for "parent reasons" (e.g., substance abuse, abandonment, or neglect) than White children.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services convened the African American Disparities Committee to study why African American children in Minnesota were disproportionately represented in child-welfare out-of-home placements. The study examined each stage of the child-welfare system and the impact on children in an effort

to determine why outcomes differed by race. Researchers used welfare performance indicators and data to understand why disparities resulted in different outcomes for African American children, to determine whether outcomes occurred at each decision-making point.

The Minnesota committee unequivocally confirmed that there were numerous racial disparities in the representation of African American children in the child-welfare system. The study concluded that African American children were 16.3 times more likely to be placed out of home during child-protection investigations than White children. Disparities were found to be systemic and multilayered, and were "unacceptable in a state that boasts of many positive and progressive well-being indicators and outcomes for the rest of its child population." The reasons for disparate treatment of African American children was difficult to pinpoint and could not be related to just one factor or episode. The report acknowledged that socioeconomic status, racial bias, case practices of the child-welfare workers, and reporting patterns and practices all played a role in the overrepresentation of African American children.

The study strategies included focus on improving county practices, including case reviews of several counties; counties were to develop a self-assessment process; increased monitoring and evaluation; development of service and training strategies; and partnering with African American communities. There were no follow-up studies to ascertain if the recommendations proposed in the study improved or changed outcomes for African American children in the child-welfare system in Minnesota.

CWLA (Cross, 2008) presented research findings on the overrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in child welfare to the U.S. House of Representatives

Subcommittee on July 31, 2008. The study found that at the end of fiscal year 2005, 506,000 children were in foster care and there were 3.3 million reports of abuse and neglect resulting in 899,000 children substantiated as abused or neglected in that same year. However, even after intervention, 40% of children did not receive follow-up services. The study cited poverty as a contributing factor to disproportionality and that lack of access hindered the ability of parents to complete a case plan. An additional contributing factor was that African American children were more likely to be placed out of home at each decision point in the child-welfare process, thus disproportionate numbers of children entered foster care. Barriers and problems associated with reunification services showed that Black families were more likely to spend an average of about 2 years longer in care than White children, and White children were almost four times more likely to reunify with their families than Black children. For African American single-parent households, reunification with their children was less likely.

Further reviews specifically outlined the actions the members of the Subcommittee should initiate: Examine the rates at which children of various ethnic groups were reported and substantiated; examine the relationship between poverty, culture, individual racism, and institutional racism in the system as a whole; address the lack of resources, protective factors, and community-based support as contributing factors; review the decision-making process; examine the social-service system and its response to children of color; take action to ensure availability and equitable provision of family preservation and support services; and provide special focus on the overrepresentation of children and families of color at all stages of the child-welfare system.

A review of the literature shows that in May 2007, the Government Accountability Offices (GAO) heard testimony on why states have difficulty ensuring the safety, well-being, and permanency of children in their care. The GAO research found that states reported providing inadequate levels of mental health and substance-abuse services to clients. Further, states reported experiencing challenges in finding homes for special-needs children to improve outcomes for children under their care. Child-welfare officials cited various reasons for the existing challenges in their states, including lack of funding for family support and lack of caseload standards.

The USDHHS (2007) and Congress disagreed with the states' concluding recommendation that USDHHS provide funding to improve awareness of and access to various social services. USDHHS commented that it was "insufficient to address the need for additional services" and implied that local welfare agencies were not using such available resources already in place (2007, p. 26). USDHHS did not believe that social workers were aware of federal resources such as health and housing available in their demographic area and had not coordinated with other agencies to use the resources. However, there were no specific federal requirements or child-welfare funding; therefore, states were slow in addressing existing and future challenges in the child-welfare system.

Washington State conducted a study on racial disproportionality in 2007 and a review of the literature confirmed that racial disproportionality does exist in the Washington State Child Welfare System. As with many research findings, Washington State found that disproportionality occurs when the initial referral made to CPS results in the child's removal from their home. Children remain out of home for over 2 years after the initial placement into foster care.

Summary

This section reviewed literature on the historical background of the child-welfare system in America and California, the role of the federal government's involvement in most sectors of child welfare, and the foster-care system. Additional review of the literature included research on the disproportionate numbers of African American youth in foster care. Although researchers focused much of their study on the *scope* and *root* of disproportionality, many studies did not offer viable solutions to reducing the overrepresentation of African American families involved in child welfare. *Scope* refers to studies that described disproportionate representation in the population and the process involved when a child is removed from their family and placed into foster care. Scope also includes studies of disproportionality and disparity that examine variation by age, geographic location, and time. *Root* causes are the reasons some children are treated differently and the extent to which disparate treatment occurs (Wulczyn & Lery, 2007).

Research shows that the government is not planning to fund issues related to race and disparity, despite studies that show race is a factor related to disproportionality. Government agencies do not want or plan to fund welfare agencies to implement programs that would provide resources and training to address disproportionality. Few welfare agencies actually work to improve the lives of families and children in foster care. The GAO acknowledged that lack of funding was a deterrent in implementing and correcting the problem, but offered no concrete solutions to caseworkers. The GAO suggested that caseworkers failed to take advantage of the "resources," though there were none offered.

Researchers who explored overrepresentation and disproportionality have recommended strategies agencies could use to implement changes in working effectively with families, but few agencies have initiated the changes in their individual programs. Neither the recommendations nor the conclusions affected the way agencies and social workers worked with families of color.

Gender, Race, and Child Welfare

Overview

In the 1960s, the politics of welfare became racialized and sexualized, laying the groundwork for the stereotype of the "welfare queen," depicting the typical welfare recipient as African American (Nadasen, 2007). Public policy in child welfare directly impacted women of color in general and African American women specifically. Racist ideas emerged from slaveholders and their associates and were consistently supported and controlled by those Whites who controlled major institutions, including the economy, law, politics, education, and religion, and ultimately the child-welfare system (Feagin, 2010). White politician's assumption about African American women's character is based on race, gender, and class-based stereotypes and are the subtext of political discussions in the last decade (Lindhorst & Mancoske, 2003). Many of the stereotypes society ascribes to women who receive welfare benefits are based on myths, but contribute to the public's perceptions about women who are Black and poor and do not have adequate means to support themselves.

The image of the "welfare queen" framed the political discourse about race, class, and gender in modern America (Lubiano, 1998). Welfare became a code word for race and came to symbolize the problems in Black communities—poverty, single parenthood,

family breakup, and unemployment—laid at the doorstep of African American women. Black women on welfare mobilized, organized and challenged the punitive, discriminatory, and dehumanizing nature of the welfare program (Nadasen, 2007).

However, the stereotypes continue to influence how Americans think and talk about race.

This section of the literature reviewed the welfare system's bias directed toward Black women and the strategies policy makers use to control the lives of African American women.

Stereotypes of Black Women in the Child-Welfare System

The social status of Black and White women throughout history has differed dramatically in this country and few, if any, similarities can be found in the life experiences of the two groups. Although both groups were subjected to sexist victimization, Black women were subjected to oppression and racism that no White woman had to endure. White women do not feel that they should be held responsible for racist oppression even though sexist discrimination has prevented them from assuming the dominant role in the perpetuation if White racism, but it has not prevented them from absorbing, supporting, and advocating racist ideology or acting individually as racist oppressors in various spheres of American life (hooks, 1981).

Roberts (2002) rigorously examined the child-welfare system and found that the system has consistently failed African American and Native American children in America. Roberts' (2002) study showed that "Black children involved in the child-welfare system receive inferior treatment according to every measure, including provision of in-home and adoption services, recommended versus actual length of

placement, and worker contact with the child and caregiver“ (p. 20). Roberts (2002) further reported that the child-welfare system is built on the presumption that children's basic needs for sustenance must and can be met solely by parents, in spite of being Black, female, uneducated, and living in poverty. Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972) pointed out that

> the underlying philosophy of the present child welfare system is that *all* families should be able to function adequately without the assistance of society and that failure to perform the parental role without such assistance is indicative of individual pathology. (p. viii)

AFDC was dismantled over a decade ago and was the primary support system for poor women and children in this country. The debate about welfare was and continues to be constructed by a language of morality and racial fear and was racialized and sexualized in the 1960s when politicians used welfare as a platform for getting elected. The women who receive welfare benefits are described by politicians as "welfare queens," and are dehumanized, demeaned, and vilified by politicians and in the media (Nadasen, 2007). As increasing numbers of Black women applied for welfare, politicians and policy makers instituted more punitive measures, including work requirements.

Welfare became a code word for race and suggested that the problem in Black communities was primarily because welfare recipients, mostly single Black women, were lazy and did not want to work (Nadasen, 2007). Even though mothers' pensions contained strict eligibility requirements that forced single mothers receiving assistance to conform to White middle-class standards, ADC did provide a small allowance to help African American mothers raise their children (Abramovitz, 1988; Gordon, 1994).

In the 1930s, significant numbers of White women were on welfare rolls but ADC gave women of color little assistance. African American women were denied assistance

and local officials passed regulations to deny eligibility and remove them from the welfare rolls. As an example, eligibility was denied if the women did not have a suitable home; if she had a child and was not married; if they knew that a man was in the house with the mother; if the mother refused to work because she had small children and could not afford childcare (Abramovitz, 1988; W. Bell, 1965; Piven & Cloward, 1971; Zylan, 1994). However, African American women have always had a long history of employment outside the home and were part of the labor market. As a consequence, Black women were more often seen as laborers rather than mothers, and therefore, less deserving of public assistance than other women (Boris, 1993; Jones, 1985).

According to theorists, longstanding beliefs have detrimental effects that contribute to the political marginalization of single poor African American mothers and the beliefs are shared by many in the African American community, producing secondary marginalization (Cohen, 1996). "Welfare queen" is the public identity proxy used for all welfare recipients and often leads to misdiagnosis of the problem (Hancock, 2003).

Critical Race Theory, Gender Bias, and Politics

The child-welfare system advances the interests of politicians and the White elite, because racism in child welfare is "ordinary" and is one of the basic tenets of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical race theorists believe that racism is ordinary, and is the usual way society does business, the common everyday experiences of most people of color in America. CRT examines and challenges the ways race and racism have shaped social structures in the United States. Institutional racism in the child-welfare system functions to oppress women and children who are impoverished and disenfranchised (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Critical race theorists argue that perspectives are concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT is a fitting context in which to explore the intersections of race, gender, and the child-welfare system and the impact on the lives of former and current youth. CRT names and discusses the daily realities of racism and exposes how racism continues to privilege Whites and to disadvantage people of color. CRT also legitimates and promotes the voices of people of color by using storytelling to integrate experiential knowledge drawn from a shared history as "the other" into critiques of dominant social orders. Early CRT held that the experiences of African Americans constituted the paradigm by which race and its redress must be conceptualized and enacted (Bell, 1973; Freeman, 1978).

CRT contains an activist dimension that not only attempts to understand our social situation but tries to change it. It attempts to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies in an effort to change it for the better (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT builds on the insights of two previous movements: critical legal studies and radical feminism. The United States has oppressed African American women and the Black race as a whole, and for much of its history, extreme racial oppression, segregation, and slavery have underlain the foundation of this country (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972; Feagin, 2010; Wise, 2008). Laws passed by Congress and implemented by child-welfare agencies continue to negatively impact children and families of color across the nation.

Welfare and race were routinely used by politicians employing code terms that thinly camouflaged overt racism. Terms like *welfare queens, welfare chiselers,*

generations of welfare dependency, and *children having children* were commonplace in 1990s discussion of the need for welfare reform (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). The racialized gender politics of welfare yielded reforms that subordinate women of color disproportionately, both ideologically and in their practical effects. Feminist legal scholars challenged laws' deeply inscribed patriarchy, showed that gender and sex roles are constructed, not natural, and named and condemned such practices (Johnson, 1994). Many CRT writers believed that a major stumbling block to racial reform is that the dominant culture's mindset is invested in continuing to believe the negative stereotypes of African Americans and people of color in the United States.

Ladson-Billings (2009) posited that Black womanhood is so routinely debased and denigrated that it helps to construct a perception of Black women as unfit and unworthy as teachers and mothers. Using CRT analysis, Ladson-Billings (2009) described how Black women have been portrayed in the United States and why the stereotypical portrayals solidify the negative notions of Black women in professional life, particularly as teachers. Black women as mothers continue to face a separate and different set of standards about what it means to be a good teacher and/or mother. The construction of Black women has for centuries been a central strategy for organizing a regime of truth (Foucault, 1972) around the standards of beauty, sexuality, motherhood, and the care and education of her children.

Summary

This section discussed the perceptions, stereotypes, and American society's belief that African American women were considered "welfare queens" whose only goal was to sit home and collect welfare. The reality is that African American women have always

cared for their children, have been a major part of the working class, and have been the main supporters of their children throughout history. Critical race theorists criticized the stereotypes and assumptions politicians have long employed to deny poor African American women access to welfare assistance readily available to others.

Resiliency Theory

Overview

Children who were raised in less than ideal family situations or foster care may be inhibited emotionally socially or intellectually and these factors may prevent them from reaching their full potential (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Studies on children raised in foster care show that they have poorer outcomes than children raised in intact or higher functioning families. Children who succeed in spite of adversity have been identified as resilient, possessing certain strengths and benefitting from protective factors that help them overcome adverse conditions and thrive (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). It is essential to understand what environmental and protective factors improve and support resilience for children and at-risk youth. The first section reviewed literature on resilience, the second part of this section reviewed studies on resiliency associated with foster youth and the third section reviewed studies on relational resiliency, despite psychopathological risks.

Studies on Resiliency

Werner and Smith (2001) conducted a study on resilience of men and women who were born in 1955 and lived on the island of Kauai. The Kauai Longitudinal Study monitored the impact of biological and psychosocial rick factors, stressful life events, and protective factors on the development of the men and women born on the island at ages 1,

2, 10, 17/18, 31/32, and 40. The high-risk children generated special interest when Werner and Smith (2001) noticed that in spite of exposure to birth complications, discordant and impoverished home lives, and uneducated, alcoholic or mentally disturbed parents, these children went on to develop healthy personalities, stable careers, and strong interpersonal relationships. The resilient children grew into competent, confident, and caring adults. They identified protective factors and processes that contributed to the resilience of children and to the recovery in adulthood of the most troubled teenagers.

Most of the studies on resiliency are homogenous and have focused on the lives of White people who were born before World War II (Werner & Smith, 2001). Few investigators have followed populations of children and youth into adulthood to monitor the long-term effects of risk and protective factors, and they vary in their selection of subjects (Werner & Smith, 2001).

Since the 1950s, behavioral scientists have been interested in the negative impact of biological psychosocial factors on the development of children. In contrast to *retrospective* studies, *prospective* longitudinal studies have consistently shown that even among individuals exposed to multiple stressors, it is unusual for more than half to develop serious disabilities of persistent problems (Robins, 1978).

In the last 2 decades, behavioral scientists began to shift their attention from negative developmental outcomes to individuals who had made a successful adaptation to life despite great odds (Anthony & Cohler, 1987; Masten & Garmezy, 1985; Rutter, 2000; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992). The phenomenon of resilience is the dynamic process that leads to positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Researchers have studied high-risk individuals with good

developmental outcomes: persons who sustained high competence under considerable stress and individuals who successfully recovered from serious trauma (Werner, 1995).

Resilience is conceived as an end product of buffering processes that do not eliminate risks and adverse conditions, but allow the individual to deal with them effectively (Rutter, 1987). Only recently has the focus of research on resilience and protective factors shifted to early and middle adulthood. The study of resilience in later life is still an uncharted territory. Staudinger, Marsiske, and Baltes (1993) explicitly addressed the significance of life course in resilience. They proposed a connection between the developmental psychopathological approach, which has its roots in studies of high-risk children, and the concept of reserve capacity.

A study from the Berkeley Guidance Study and the Oakland Adolescent Growth Study originated from the Institute of Human Development at the University of California at Berkeley (Clausen, 1993; Elder, 1999). The study traced the long-term effects of poverty and economic misfortune on the individual life course. The study examined 136 members from Berkeley born in 1928/29 who experienced the Great Depression as preschoolers. Clausen (1993) used the concept of "planful competence" as an organizing principle for the life course of the participants. The study examined self-confidence, intellectual investment, and dependability. The study, comprised of men and women, found that "planful competence" in adolescence predicted greater educational attainment and fewer life crises in every decade up to their fifties. For the men, it predicted greater occupational attainment and for the women, happier and more enduring marriages.

Elder (1999) examined the impact of sudden financial misfortune on the life course of the Berkeley and Oakland participants. The study found that an easy temperament, physical attractiveness, and positive mother–child relationships buffered the impact of the father's negative behavior during hard times in the Berkeley group. The study found that the Oakland group's personal assets, such as intelligence (for the men) and physical attractiveness (for the women), were protective buffers against the trauma of financial hardship, as was a high degree of achievement motivation. Children from economically disadvantaged families sought more advice and companionship among trusted persons outside the immediate family, such as teachers or mentors.

Ryff, Singer, Love, and Essex, (1998) conducted a study on the life histories of 168 women and found four primary pathways to resilience among midlife women. The first subgroup was comprised of women who had positive beginnings and perceived their achievements in life favorably despite adversities in life. The second subgroup of women was comprised of women who grew up in families with alcoholic parents and who had experienced three or more acute, stressful events in life. However, they relied on and had strong social support and employment was stable. They reported high psychological well-being in midlife despite adversities earlier in life. The third subgroup came from families with early advantages, and families that experienced few adversities. However, as they matured and experienced adversities in adulthood, they recovered from adverse experiences due to their problem-free childhoods. The final subgroup came from intact families, but one of the parents did not graduate from high school. This group confronted an array of problems and adversities but maintained a high level of psychological well-being and satisfaction with themselves. The study concluded that there are diverse

pathways through adversity to resiliency, but protective roles from early childhood provided participants with the inner resources to persevere despite adversity.

Cederblad (1996) conducted a study of 148 adults between the ages of 42 and 56 in Sweden, individuals who were part of a subsample of the Lundby study. The participants had been exposed to three or more psychiatric risk factors such as parental mental illness, alcoholism, family discord, or abuse. The study found that three of four were functioning well in midlife (Cederblad, 1996; Cederblad, Dahlin, Hagnell, & Hansson, 1994, 1995). The protective factors Cederblad (1996) found to be associated with positive mental health in adulthood in the high-risk group were intellectual capacity and self-esteem in childhood; an internal locus of control and a desire to improve one's lot in adolescence; trusting relationships and shared sense of value with one of the parents, in addition to growing up in a family of four or fewer children.

Werner and Smith (2001) found that *prospective* studies that focused on psychological, social, and biological processes that lead to varied pathways in resilience were rare (p. 12). Theirs was the only study that followed members of the baby boom generation from birth to the age of 40. In addition, the study focused on the stability of resilience from childhood to adulthood, but also on the ability of high-risk individuals to recover in later life after a difficult youth. There is less known about the lives of adult women who overcame traumatic childhoods and youth than about the adult lives of men who overcame early adversity. The study allowed Werner and Smith (2001) to fill some of the gaps in the differences between men and women, how they deal with adversities in adult life, and how their resilience shapes their expectations for the second half of life.

Resiliency Among Former Foster Youth

Histories of adverse events in life have all been associated with poorer mental health outcomes (Edwards, Holden, Felitti, & Anda, 2003; Emery & Laumann-Billings, 1998; Kendall-Takett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993). When adversity happens in one's life, the negative effects can be long lasting. Foster youth are among the most vulnerable members of society and research has focused on the challenges they face as they emancipate from foster care and transition to adult independence (Merdinger, Hines, Osterling, & Wyatt, 2005). Little is known about those foster youth who successfully make the transition from foster care to lead productive lives, because the majority of the literature focuses on the negative outcomes of former foster youth (Merdinger et al., 2005). According to Rak and Patterson (1996), researchers are concerned that at-risk children stand only a slight chance of attaining their full potential as adults. In modern society, it has become common to identify certain children as "at risk" of failing to succeed because of hardships in their young lives (Rak & Patterson, 1996). However, many children who encounter stress and adversity in life fare well despite exposure to severe challenges (Alvord & Grados, 2005; Brooks, 2006; Masten, 2007, 2011; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1991; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Rak & Patterson, 1996; Werner & Smith, 1982).

According to Zolkoski and Bullock (2012), risk factors are *probability* statements and the levels of risk change depending on the time and place. The predictive validity of early risk indicators varies with the time of the assessment, the developmental systems assessed, and the individual variations in the responses of children to the changing context of their care-giving environments. Children born healthy may become at risk due

to poverty, level of parents' education, and family conflict (Brooks, 2006; Masten, 2011; Rak & Patterson, 1996). Negative life experiences such as maltreatment, violence, abuse and/or neglect are predictors of poor life outcomes (Brooks, 2006; Masten, 2011; Rak & Patterson, 1996). Minority status (Masten, 2011) and racial discrimination (Brooks, 2006) are also predictors of poor outcomes for children and youth. As an example, African American and Hispanic children are disproportionately disadvantaged. Many live in poverty in blighted neighborhoods and lack accessibility to social supports, community services, and employment opportunities.

Cicchetti and Rogosch (1997) posited resilience is not a one-dimensional dichotomous attribute that an individual does or does not have. It has been suggested that a resilient individual must show positive outcomes across multiple aspects of life over a period of time. Resilience indicates the possession of several skills, in varying degrees, that help a person cope (Alvord & Grados, 2005). The common thread is that people have been able to lead more successful lives than expected despite being at greater risk than average for serious problems (Brooks, 2006).

Resilience refers to achieving positive outcomes despite challenging or threatening circumstances (Brooks, 2006; Masten, 2001; Masten et al. 1991), coping successfully with traumatic experiences and avoiding negative paths linked to risks (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1985; Luthar et al., 2000; Werner, 1992). An essential requirement of resilience is the presence of risk and protective factors helping to promote positive outcomes or reduce negative outcomes (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Resilience theory is focused on strengths rather than deficits; and on understanding healthy

development and good outcomes in spite of exposure to adversity and risks (Masten, 2001).

Merdinger et al. (2005) conducted in-depth interviews of 15 foster youth who had successfully made the transition from high school to 4-year college or universities and found that the youth possessed characteristics that identified them as gifted or talented in elementary school or enrollment in advanced placement or college preparatory classes in high school. The importance of problem solving, reasoning, and academic competence has been a consistent finding among researchers who study resiliency (Kumpfer, 1999; U.S. Department of Labor, 2000).

The youth who participated in the study were different from many foster youth because only a few received mental health treatment, special education, or had difficulty with law enforcement. The youth also drew support from other people in their lives. Research into resiliency has consistently shown that social support is a critical protective factor (Bernard, 2004; Werner & Smith, 2001). The study revealed that the youth had a strong sense of positive roles that others played in their success. The youth expressed being grateful and/or satisfied with their lives, no matter how difficult their experiences were. McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002) stated "grateful people tend to focus on the positive contributions of others to their well-being" (p. 120). Social support came from a variety of sources, including biological family, mentors, former foster family members, and other professionals (Hass & Graydon, 2009).

Caring relationships were identified as an important source of resiliency and youths described those who provided this kind of support as "turnaround people" (Bernard, 2004, p. 46). Turnaround people provide compassion, caring, and respect and

also help youth better understand their own strengths and resources. The respondents in the study were consistently able to identify others in their lives who provided comprehensive support (Hass & Graydon, 2009). For example, 12% of participants mentioned mentors, and 35% mentioned therapists or counselors. Seligman (2002) stated that the absence of the ability to recruit what youth needed from other people "can undermine serenity, contentment, and satisfaction" (p. 70).

The participants expressed a strong sense of commitment to help others and tended to be involved in community and church. Many volunteered to work with other youth and many had plans for their future and appeared confident to achieve their goals (Hass & Graydon, 2009). Most felt they had a purpose in life. Helping others and having a sense of confidence in their ability to reach their goals is what Bernard (2004) called this " a sense of purpose and bright future" (p. 28). Bernard (2004) suggested there is a strong relationship between sense of goals and purpose and academic competence and problem-solving skills.

Results of the Sense of Coherence Scale (SOC) infer a different situation than that provided by youth's responses to the other questions in the survey. Antonovsky (1979) defined the sense of coherence as a feeling of confidence that one's environment is predicable and there is a good chance that obstacles will be overcome. The results suggest that although successful foster youth appreciated the role others have played in their lives, they continue to lack confidence in their abilities to cope and see the world as somewhat unpredictable (Hass & Graydon, 2009). Hass and Graydon (2009) suggested that participants had strong social support that also supported their sense of goals and

academic achievement; they also appeared to retain an unusual level of anxiety about life and doubts about their own abilities to cope with life's demands.

Overall, former foster youth who successfully made the transition from foster care to achieving their goals by attending college despite serious impediments to their success, did so because of their own resiliency, their personality, and strong support from people they trusted and who believed in them. Many were characterized as having strong outgoing personalities, and they were able to articulate their needs to caring adults.

Positive Emotions and Psychological Resilience

A study on psychological resilience was characterized as the ability to bounce back from negative emotional experiences and by flexible adaptation to the changing demands of stressful experiences (Block & Block, 1980; Block & Kremen, 1996; Lazarus, 1993). Several research methodologies found that resilient individuals have optimistic, zestful, and energetic approaches to life, are curious and open to new experiences and are characterized by high positive emotionality (Block & Kremen, 1996; Klohnen, 1996). Werner and Smith (1992) suggested highly resilient people proactively cultivate their positive emotionality by strategically eliciting positive emotions through the use of humor, relaxation techniques (Demos, 1989; Wolin & Wolin, 1993), and optimistic thinking (Kumpfer, 1999). Positive emotionality emerges as an important element of psychological resiliency (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

Three studies explored the benefits of positive emotions in fueling psychological resilience to stressful events. Using meditational analyses, the study revealed that the experience of positive emotions might have contributed to the ability to achieve efficient emotion regulation (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Highly resilient individuals tended to

experience positive emotions even amid stress. Another finding from the study was that positive emotions contribute to the ability for resilient individuals to physiologically recover from negative emotional arousal (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

The study concluded that individuals with greater tendencies to use humor to cope (Lefcourt, Davidson-Katz, & Kueneman, 1990), and who are in positive moods most days (Stone et al., 1994), have stronger immune systems and are less likely to get sick or use medical services when faced with stressful events (Goldman, Kraemer, & Salovey, 1996). The tendency to maintain positive emotion acts as a resource to buffer against the advancement of disease and death (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997; Taylor, Kemeny, Reed, Bower, & Gruenewald, 2000).

Summary

Self-awareness, along with self-esteem and self-efficacy are important attributes related to resilience. Former foster youth who successfully navigated the transition to adulthood tend to exhibit resilient characteristics. Resilience is defined as successful adaptation or the absence of pathological outcomes following exposure to stressful or traumatic life events or circumstances. This section discussed several studies on resilience and the factors that contributed to resilience in life.

Researchers have focused their attention on identifying protective factors that served to modify the adverse effects of risks in a positive direction. Masten and Garmezy (1985) described three major categories of protective factors: individual attributes, relationships, and external support systems. These protective factors have been remarkably reliable in predicting positive psychological functioning following adversity. Masten (2001) concluded, “resilience emerges not from rare or extraordinary qualities

and circumstances but from the everyday magic of ordinary normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities" (p. 201).

Research on sources of resiliency among successful foster youth found that social support was deemed most important to them. Resilient individuals pointed out that on the deepest level, relationships and others' beliefs in them empowered them to move forward. Another factor discussed was gratitude and being appreciative of the people who were in their lives. Resilient people show competence, self-confidence, and the ability to reach out to adults. Many tend to have outgoing personalities. Resilient people are often self-reliant but flexible, responsible, and persevering. Above all, resilient persons have initiative, trust, autonomy, and hope for their future.

Self-Determination Theory

Research on achievement goals, motivation, self-efficacy, and self- determination theories were examined in the context of participants' journey from childhood to adulthood. The achievement-goal approach is the predominant approach to achievement motivation in the contemporary literature (Elliot & Dweck, 2005). Empirical work on the achievement-goal framework continued to accumulate and by the end of 2003, over 60 studies from 12 different countries had appeared in print (Elliot & Maier, 2007). There is little consensus in the achievement-goal literature as to whether "goal" in "achievement goal" is best represented as aim (Elliot & Thrash, 2002); a combination of reason and aim (Dweck, 1986) or overarching orientation (Ames & Archer, 1988).

Deci and Ryan (2000) conducted key studies on factors causative for self-determination theory (SDT). Deci and Ryan (2000) posited that *self* goes deeper than

cognition and is not a set of cognitive mechanisms and structures but a set of motivational processes with a variety of assimilatory and regulatory functions. Deci (1980, Deci and Ryan (1985, 1987) provided a framework for distinguishing, empirically and theoretically, that intrinsic motivation is an innate and active element of the self, inseparable from one's own true nature. Research on intrinsic motivation became increasingly important over the two prevailing behavior theories during that era: Skinner's (1953) operant theory and Hull's (1943) drive theory.

Deci and Ryan (2002) proposed that the self has an innate, universal, and psychological need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Youth in foster care have a very difficult time relating to others in a social setting, as the stigma of foster care and the instability of their day-to-day lives without their family could potentially shake the feelings of competence humans innately possess. Hull's (1943) empirical theory on drive posited that motivation for all behaviors is reducible to a small set of drives. Learning, interacting with others, and performing in a game or concert is reducible to physiological-deficit needs such as hunger, thirst, sex, and the avoidance of pain.

During the 1950s, psychology was focused primarily on drives such hunger and sex as the basis for all motivated behaviors. White (1959) argued that a set of phenomena was identified with humans, in addition to rats and monkeys that support this claim. White (1959) proposed a new type of motivation that would supplement the drives as an energizing force after observing people and animals engaging in behaviors—such as play and exploration—that did not appear to reduce drives, but instead appeared to induce them. White (1959) named the new type of motivation "effectance motivation" and posited that its effective functioning is the basis for healthy developments. White's

(1959) description fit the definition of a "need for competence" (Deci, 1980), though White refrained from using the term.

This first part of this section reviews the literature on achievement theory; the second part reviews literature on SDT.

Achievement Theory

There is surprisingly little consensus in the achievement-goal literature on whether "goal" in "achievement goal" is best represented as aim (Elliot & Thrash, 2002), a combination of reason and aim, (Dweck, 1986), or overarching orientation (Ames & Archer, 1988). Some researchers and disciplines have adopted Ames and Archer's (1987, 1988) terminological recommendation of "mastery" and "performance" goals. Other researchers and disciplines have continued to use an assortment of different labels (Elliot, 2007).

Many researchers use the achievement-goal construct in a dispositional manner in their empirical work (Elliot, 2007), from both conceptual and empirical standpoints. Conceptually, the achievement-goal approach originated as a critique of dispositional constructs and as a move toward a more specific contextual level of analysis (Dweck & Wortman, 1982; Maehr & Nicholls, 1980).

Eccles (2007) studied the motivational factors that might underlie the gender differences in the educational, vocational, and avocational patterns of achievement-related choices. Eccles (2007) and colleagues proposed that educational, vocational, and other achievement-related choices are most directly related to two sets of beliefs: the individual's expectations for success, and the importance or value the individual attaches to the various options perceived by the individual as available (Eccles, 2007). The model

specified the relation of beliefs to cultural norms, experiences, aptitudes, and those personal beliefs and attitudes that are commonly assumed to be associated with achievement-related activities (Eccles, 1987; Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998).

Eccles' (2007) argued that it is important to understand individual, gender, and other group differences in achievement-related choices (p. 106). The study of achievement-related choices focuses on conscious and nonconscious choices. Eccles (2007) also argued that

> the conscious and non-conscious choices people make about how to spend time and effort ultimately lead to marked differences between groups and individuals in lifelong achievement-related patterns. Many gender differences in educational and vocational aspirations and choices occur on achievement-related behaviors, aspirations involve the element of choice, even if heavily influenced by socialization pressures and cultural norms. (p. 107)

Although individuals choose from among several options, they do not actively or consciously consider the full range of objectively viable options.

Deci and Ryan's (2000) research on SDT has differentiated the concept of goal-directed behavior, but has taken a different approach. SDT differentiates the *content* of goals or outcomes and the *regulatory processes* through which the outcomes are pursued, making predictions for different contents and for different processes. The concept of *innate psychological needs* was used as a basis for integrating the differentiations of goal contents and regulatory processes and the predictions that resulted from those differentiations. According to SDT, a critical issue in the effects of goal pursuit and attainment concerns the degree to which people are able to satisfy their basic psychological needs as they pursue and attain their valued outcomes.

In their initial work on self-determination theory, Deci and Ryan's (1985) study focused attention on the distinction between *intrinsic* motivation and *extrinsic*

motivation. According to motivational theorists, individuals who are intrinsically motivated perform activities for their own sake and because of interest in the activity. Individuals extrinsically motivated perform tasks or activities for rewards or to avoid punishment rather than for intrinsic rewards. Deci and Ryan (1985) argued that the basic need for competence and self-determination play a role in more extrinsically motivated behavior.

Deci and Ryan (1991) and Ryan and Deci, (2000) went beyond extrinsic–intrinsic motivation by introducing the idea of self-determination. From the perspective of the self being the core of what one is, Deci and Ryan (1990) characterized the self as explicit or implicit, reflecting the nature of what human beings are. From their perspectives, "the central feature of human nature is an active agency and a synthetic tendency that they ascribed to the self. Therefore, the development of self begins with intrinsic activity and the tendency toward coherent elaboration" (p. 239). Human beings are not born as blank slates waiting for the world to fill in the blanks. Deci and Ryan (1990) posited that there is an inherent self that has potential, tendencies, and innate abilities, with the motivation to relate and assimilate information. By exercising one's capabilities, and interacting in social contexts, the self emerges and develops with inherent characteristics that integrate into the whole being.

Individuals known to be self-motivated engage in a proactive process of knowing themselves from within and actively integrate information from the social world. Their ego development and theory of self enable those individuals to go beyond their capacity to succeed and place them in a social context where they will succeed.

Narratives and Critical Race Theory

McAdams et al. (2008) and Singer (2004) posited that life stories bring together one's memories of the past and hopes for their future life that would provide a degree of unity, meaning, and purpose. Recent research suggests that life stories may contain developmental scripts that sometimes suggests a trajectory similar to Erikson's (1950) theory of development (Wilt, Cox, & McAdams, (2010).

CRT embraces a movement of scholars whose work challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture, and, more generally, in American society as a whole (Crenshaw, 2011). Crenshaw (2011), called for a broader definition of CRT and for the next phase of this movement to embrace scholars from disciplines other than the law. There is ongoing debate about the existence and efficacy of CRT, and its exposition in the narrative format is not used by the majority of scholars regarding legal issues regardless of whether they pertain to race or race-related issues (Johnson, 1994).

When discussing CRT narrative, or the more precise *voice of color*, scholars critical of CRT conceded that CRT and narratives of women could be meritorious. The voice of color is socially constructed and is a product of the past and present, which looks to the future. If current racial categorizations are maintained, they will result in continued subordination of African Americans (Sowell, 1983). Voice of color offers a unique perspective in that it encompasses the concept of "historical-race," a concept in which African Americans examine topical issues through a historical lens that recognizes and refuses to ignore a past in which race-based subordination was legal and legitimate. Subordination has created a concept or perspective of "status-race" (Gotanda, 1992).

Narrative theory initially developed from examining literary works and the many texts that were viewed through narratives, including through spoken, written, and visual materials (Riessman, 2008). Social scientists found a range of definitions of narrative, often linked to discipline. Narratives can mobilize others into action for progressive social change and provides a way to make sense of the past (Riessman, 2008).

The first section of the literature reviews CRT and narrative, also known as voice of color, and the historical construct of telling stories in the Black community. The second section reviewed literature on narrative theory, focusing on literature specific to the narratives of women of color.

Critical Race Theory and Voices of Color

Qualitative researchers use social-science theories to frame their theoretical lens in studies (Creswell, 2007). Ladson-Billings and Donnor (2005) argued that participants in narrative theory represent underrepresented or marginal groups, whether those differences take the form of gender, race, class, religion, sexuality, and geography, or some intersection of these differences. They further posited that research questions strive to understand specific issues or topics such as racism, sexism, unequal power relationships, or inequities in our society (Creswell, 2007). Historically, African American women have been underrepresented in research studies in all areas of academic inquiry (Akbar, 1991; Guthrie, 1998; Kerkorian, Traube, & McKay, 2007). In the field of psychology, historical evidence has suggested cultural stereotyping (Guthrie, 1998). Racism and oppression are upheld when investigating and interpreting African American behavior (Jung, 1930).

According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), when the ideology of racism is examined and racist injuries are named, victims of racism find their voice. They discover they are not alone in their marginality and become empowered participants, hearing their stories and the stories of others. They further asserted that the ideology of racism creates, maintains, and justifies the use of "master narratives" in storytelling, and that it is in the context of racism that "monovocal" stories about low educational achievement and attainment of students of color are told. The stories of African American women's lived experiences and perceptions are rarely researched in the social sciences, and little is known about women formerly in foster care. Solòrzano and Yosso further postulated that counterstorytelling is a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are often not told. "Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform. (p. 32).

According to Riessman (2008), "narrative constitutes past experiences at the same time it provides ways for individuals to make sense of the past; narrators argue with stories and storytelling engages an audience in the experience of the narrator" (pp. 8–9). Riessman (2008) postulated that stories can mobilize others into action for progressive social change. Narratives reveal truths about human experience and allow a search for meaning by making sense of events through storytelling.

Summary

This section reviewed literature on narratives and CRT and voices of color. The narratives of people of color are often underrepresented in society, education, and the social sciences. Storytelling from the voices of women of color reveals truths about their experiences and reveals a multilayered, textured account of lives previously discounted.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Restatement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the foster care system (a) through a historical construct, focusing on the overrepresentation of Black children in foster care, and the extent to which the nature and scope of disproportionality and racial and ethnic disparity has impacted children of color; (b) to understand the perceptions, challenges and lived experiences of African American women and one Mexican American woman formerly in foster care in their own voice; and (c) to explore the factors that influenced the development of life skills in overcoming the challenges of being in foster care. Research studies on former foster youth reveal poorer outcomes for most former foster youth due to a variety of reasons. This study examined factors and influences that contributed to participants' desire to plan for, work toward, and achieve long-range and short-term goals that will guide future studies on women prevailing, despite having been in foster care.

Research Design and Methodology

A qualitative approach was used in this study to explore the research questions and identify emerging themes and the lived experiences of participants. According to Denzin and Lincoln, (2005),

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (p. 3).

Creswell's (2007) definition of qualitative research posited,

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people of places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of the participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action (p. 37).

The intent of this study was to identify the key factors that motivated participants: the personal and interpersonal influences and support systems that contributed to subjective well-being, achievements, and accomplishment of goals.

The research design was comprised of in-depth interviews. According to Patton (2002) "methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon; how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, and talk about it to others, one must undertake in-depth interviews" (p. 104). A qualitative research design provides focused, in-depth, and comprehensive analysis of the data. After the data were gathered, a comprehensive analysis of the one-on-one interviews with participants explored their perceptions, challenges, and lived experiences in foster care, and the development of life skills and accomplishment of goals in their own voices. The participants' narratives provided rich data that offered original perspectives on their foster-care experiences, giving voice to their lived experiences. This chapter discusses the following methodologies: (a) the research design, which was narrative, (b) the qualitative approach involving six participants; (c) the research setting where the interviews were conducted; (d) the participants and the criteria requirements needed to participate in the study; (e) the instrumentation, which was the narrative dialogue; (f) the questions used to guide the dialogue; (g) the procedures used for data collection; (h) the human-subject protection and ethical considerations, which included

the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and confidentiality clause; and (i) the background of the researcher.

Research Design

The methodology for this qualitative study was the narrative approach. The researcher chose the narrative approach to study the lives of six mature women of color formerly in foster care. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), the narrative approach combines views from participants' lives with those of the researcher's life in a collaborative narrative. Narratives provide stories about the lives of individuals and the information is retold or "restoried" by the researcher into a narrative chronology (Creswell, 2009).

Qualitative researchers collect data in the field, or in the natural setting of the participant. Qualitative research "begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring in the meaning individuals ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). Qualitative research also situates the study in the social and cultural context of the researcher, the participant, and the reader. The research questions were organized around the problems and issues of the child-welfare system and were related to participants' foster-care experiences. Closer attention to the interpretive nature of inquiry is involved and the final report includes the voices of the participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a description and interpretation of the problem (Creswell, 2007).

I wanted to understand the factors that motivated six women of color to succeed despite being in foster and kinship care. Research conducted on foster youth who have emancipated show very poor outcomes, in contrast to the women in this study. The six

participants had little support from social-services or child-welfare workers, suffered extreme hardship in foster/kinship care, yet accomplished goals after transition to adulthood and are leading self-fulfilling lives. Furthermore, the women are a group whose voices have never been heard. In essence, their experiences were unique, and their narratives will allow them to tell their stories unfettered by preconceived expectations. The telling of their stories empowered them, and they shared their experiences so that others will know their stories.

I met with participants face-to-face and conducted one-on-one interviews at the office where participants and I work. The narrative approach created a dialogue between the participant and me, and generative themes emerged. Riessman (2008) posited

> narratives constitutes past experiences at the same time as it provides ways for individuals to make sense of the past. Stories must always be considered in context, for storytelling occurs at a historical moment with its circulating discourse and power relations. At a local level, a story is designed for particular recipients and the audience who receives the story and may interpret it differently. (p. 8)

The first interview question was to learn about the participants' home life before entry into foster care, and their kinship/foster-care experiences until emancipation from care. The second question centered on participants' lived experiences after leaving kinship/foster care and into adulthood, and the third question centered on life as mature adults, the achievement of goals, and subjective well-being. The study focused on factors that influenced the development of life skills, and during the course of the interviews I was always aware that the participants' backgrounds as child-welfare workers could be a factor in interpreting what was said during the interviews.

I spoke with each of the women who agreed to participate in this study, hand carried the packets to each participant, and gave it to them in private. All participants

signed the agreement prior to the interviews. Each participant was given a copy of the consent forms and was asked if there were any questions or concerns about the content and context of the questions. Each participant was given the opportunity to process, reflect on, and ask questions prior to the face-to-face interviews. All participants were informed that that they could withdraw at any time, should they feel uncomfortable, or if they simply changed their minds about participating. All participants stated that they would love to tell their stories to me and "maybe help some other kids who don't have hope."

I met face to face with each participant and conducted semi-structured interviews with open-ended dialogue. I chose not to meet with participants together because privacy and confidentiality were of utmost importance for them and me. Even though it was vey likely that they all knew one another, I honored the confidential nature of the study. I conducted the initial face-to-face interviews with each participant that lasted 1.5 hours. A second interview was scheduled within 2 weeks of the first interviews and lasted 1.5 to 2 hours. The longest period of time between interviews was 1 month, because one participant was not available until then. Before the two interviews were completed, I hired a transcriptionist to transcribe the dialogue from a compact disc (CD), uploaded to a digital recorder.

I personally uploaded the digitally recorded interviews on CDs and gave them to the transcriptionist. After each interview was transcribed, the transcriptionist returned the CD to me, and I kept them in a locked desk in my home office. After I received the transcribed interviews, I met with each participant in private and asked them to check the transcribed dialogue for clarification and verification of the information from the

interview. One participant clarified one statement that was not clear, and corrections were made, but all confirmed that the data collected were correct.

Research Setting

The setting for the interviews took place at the building in Oakland, CA where participants and I are employed. The building sits on a very busy street in downtown Oakland and is used for child-welfare-related activities. I planned to interview the participants on the work site and made inquiries with management about work place–employee interview protocols.

I called the agency division director in January 2012 and inquired whether the agency had protocol regarding interviewing employees on site. I was told to check with the operations manager regarding protocol. After checking the policy manual, the operations manager found no protocol about interviewing employees on site and gave approval to interview participants who agreed to participate in the study.

I had in mind a small room in the back of the second floor that could be used for the interviews. The room afforded privacy, had a small table, electrical outlets for charging the digital recorder if needed, and two comfortable chairs. I requested permission to use the room and permission was granted. The room was used for all of the interviews except two of the participants who were only available on the weekends. Four interviews were conducted during the week, because it was convenient time for participants and me. Two participants were only available on weekends, one in the morning on Saturday and the other in the evening on Sunday. The participant that could only meet on Saturday had keys to the building on weekends and the interviews took place in the conference room on the second floor adjacent to the participants' office. The

setting allowed for open dialogue with minimal distractions. The interviews that took place in the evenings were a bit more problematic, but the participant and I found a quiet area at a secluded location and the interviews went well without distractions.

Participants

The participants chosen for this study were five African American women and one Mexican American woman between the ages of mid-30s to late- 60s. The ages of participants upon entering foster/kinship care ranged from 17 months to 14 years. All remained in foster/kinship care until they emancipated at 18. The criteria for participating in the study were (a) participants were former foster youths who are employed and are living productive lives; (b) graduated from high school or have their General Education Degree, have had some college, are enrolled in college or have graduated from college; (c) between the ages of mid-30s and mid-60s; (d) had no overt signs of mental health problems or substance abuse and did not become pregnant while in their teens; and (e) were willing to participate in one-on-one, audio-recorded, open-ended interviews for this study. All of the participants met the criteria.

The participants were fully informed of the purpose of the research, to understand the perceptions, challenges, and lived experiences of five African American women and one Mexican American woman formerly in foster care in their own voice; and explore the factors that influenced the development of life skills in overcoming the challenges of being in foster care.

Protection of Human Subjects and Ethical Considerations

An IRB Protection of Human Subjects (PHS) application was submitted to and approved by the University of San Francisco. I followed the IRBPHS protocol and

observed ethical considerations. I developed an informed-consent form for participants to sign before engaging in the research. Participants had the right to refuse to participate and withdraw at any time. All data collected were kept confidential. Interviews with participants were recorded with the use of a digital audio-recorder, and were transcribed and kept in my home office locked in a desk to which only I have access. Participants remained anonymous throughout the research and were encouraged to give themselves their own pseudonyms. Participants gave themselves pseudonyms that they felt embodied them as they are in the present, and the way they perceive themselves as survivors of foster care. All said they felt empowered after choosing their own pseudonyms.

Participation in the study was voluntary. I provided participants with a consent letter, informed-consent form, and research subject's bill of rights. All paperwork informed participants of the following: (a) the purpose, background, and procedures of the study, and the results and possible social consequences it would have on their lives; (b) that the research was voluntary and that the participants could refuse to participate in the research and withdraw at any time; (c) that participants had the opportunity to choose their pseudonyms and their anonymity was protected; (d) that there was no cost or direct benefit for participating in the research, but their narratives will add in-depth, different perspectives of mature women of color formerly in foster care. The study examined their experiences, perceptions, and the complex challenges they faced while in care, and the factors that motivated them to desire better outcomes for themselves. Their stories provided a counternarrative to current research on poor outcomes for girls and youths ageing out of foster care today.

Instrumentation and Questions to Guide the Initial Dialogue

The questions that guided the dialogue covered in depth participants' foster care experiences in their own narrative styles, from childhood to adulthood, in their own voices.

1. What factors influenced the motivation, perseverance and development of life-sustaining skills as a former foster youth?
2. What personal and interpersonal influences contributed to subjective well-being after emancipation from foster care and into adulthood?
3. What factors contributed to life achievements, accomplishment of goals, and life satisfaction?

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected under the guidelines and approval of the University of San Francisco's IRBPHS. A copy of the IRB approval is located in Appendix A. The data collected consisted of in-depth interviews. I identified participants through opportunistic sampling and personal interactions with two of the participants specifically. Opportunistic sampling is taking advantage of the unexpected, and following new leads, according to Miles and Huberman (1994). I knew all participants selected for this study, but had more contact with the two who worked in my unit.

I learned that the two women with whom I frequently had lunch were former foster youths who had emancipated from the foster-care system. After some discussion, I informed them about my research proposal and asked if they would participate in the study by being interviewed about their foster-care experiences. They agreed and seemed surprised to be asked about their experiences.

I had heard through the county hearsay that there were other adults who worked at the agency who were formerly in foster care. I knew all of them and two were coworkers. Though 10 people initially expressed interest in being interviewed for the study, only six were purposefully selected based on the research criteria. The scheduling and coordination of participants took place over a 4-month period to accommodate participants' availability.

I developed the informed-consent form for participants to sign prior to the initial interview. I assured participants that their confidentiality would be protected as much as possible. Participants were informed that they had the right to refuse and withdraw at any time. Participants remained anonymous throughout the research. For confidentiality and as a means to protect their identity, I asked participants to give themselves their own pseudonyms. I felt to do so empowered them and would reflect the inner strength and fortitude they had as a result of being in foster care. Participants gave much thought to their individual pseudonyms and came up with original names that they felt "fit" them, their personalities, and portrayed them in the most positive way.

I personally gave each participant the introductory packet in private. The packet included the introduction letter (see Appendix B); consent cover letter (see Appendix C); a consent form (see Appendix D); information about the research study (see Appendix E); the care, and beyond. The interview questions were printed out for each participant prior to the interview to allow the participant time to formulate meaningful answers and to reflect on their experiences as former foster youths. All interviews were recorded on an Olympus Digital recorder. Upon completion of the digitally recorded interviews, responses were downloaded onto my iMac computer on a CD, then uploaded onto a USB

file and given to the transcriptionist I hired, who converted the dialogue to text. A backup copy of each interview was downloaded to my computer and stored in a locked drawer. I provided the transcribed dialogues to participants to review and requested that they check for accuracy. The participants and I met in person after each of the two interviews and worked collaboratively to ensure the accuracy of data.

Validity and Reliability

Both descriptive and interpretative validity were accomplished from the accurate collection and reporting of the data. The accurate account of information was collected from one-on-one interviews, transcript documentation, and field notes taken during the collection process. A review of the interview transcripts was used to engage participants in validating the data. The interview protocol was established and followed through the collection and coding process. Field notes were taken during every interview.

I reviewed transcripts and recordings in follow-up discussions with participants. I provided feedback and clarification to participants to assist in accuracy. This research was reliable and valid because participants' responses were documented, recorded, transcribed, confirmed, and reconfirmed by me. I provided copies of the transcripts to the participants for accuracy. After participants read and checked transcripts for accuracy, they returned them to me. Participants and I collaborated closely throughout the study and are coworkers in the same field.

Creswell (2007) postulated that

> validation is a distinct strength of qualitative research in that the account made through extensive time spent in the field, the detailed thick description, and the closeness of the researcher to participants in the study al add to the value or accuracy of a study. (p. 207)

Triangulation of the data through digital recording, written notes, and participants checking the transcripts aided in the accuracy of the findings. Through rigorous field procedures and protocols, the process offered the opportunity to address biases and beliefs.

The five categories that guided the research questions were (a) the personal background of participants; (b) life experiences before, during, and after emancipation from foster care; (c) emerging adulthood; support system–mentors; educational goals, career aspirations; (d) factors influencing development of life-sustaining skills; and (e) adulthood; subjective well-being; faith and spirituality.

After the dialogue was transcribed into text, I met with each participant for confirmation of accuracy and validity. I then analyzed the text data and coded the transcript of each participant's narrative. Reissman (2008) posited that narrative coding is "appropriate for exploring intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions to understand the human condition through story, which is justified in and of itself as a legitimate way of knowing" (p. 109). In contrast, Creswell (2007) noted that "data collected in a narrative study need to be analyzed for the story they have to tell, a chronology of unfolding events, and turning points or epiphanies" (p. 155). I coded the transcribed text data for generative themes and subthemes based on the three major research questions of this study. Table 1 presents the timeline of the data collection that guided and assisted me with the research process.

Table 1

Data Collection and Timelines of Dialogue

	Data collection	Timelines of dialogue
1	Provided participants informed consent form letter; bill of rights, and interview protocol. Scheduled interviews beginning mid-May 2012. Informed participants that the researcher would use an audio digital recorder and the interview would be transcribed.	May–July 2012
2	Conducted face-to-face interviews on personal backgrounds; experiences before, during and after foster care; emerging adulthood, support system/mentors, educational goals, career aspirations; factors influencing development of life sustaining skills; adulthood, subjective well-being, faith and spirituality.	May–July 2012
3	Checked transcribed dialogue. Clarified, verified and checked for accuracy of transcribed text with participants.	June–August 2012
4	Reviewed transcribed dialogues, analyzed and interpreted data, coded data and identified common themes.	July–September 2012
5	Analyzed findings for generative themes and subthemes.	July–September 2012

The theoretical framework and information gathered during the literature review on children of color in the foster-care system were used to develop specific questions to answer each research question. The research questions addressed five sections and focused on participants' experiences *before* entry into foster care, their experiences while *living* in foster care, and *after* emancipation from foster care. The interviews were the main source of data collection. The interview questions were designed to gather data for each research question below:

Research Question 1

What factors influenced the motivation, perseverance, and development of life-sustaining skills as a former foster youth?

The specific interview questions to obtain the data were as follows:

Personal Background

- Participants were asked about demographics regarding their personal background that included racial/ethnic profile, age, past and current employment history, years employed, marital status, and number of children and siblings.

Life Before, During, and After Foster Care

- Describe your home life *before* foster/kinship care, experiences in foster/kinship care, and *after* you emancipated from foster care.

Research Question 2

What personal and interpersonal influences contributed to life-sustaining skills after emancipation from foster/kinship care and into adulthood?

- What were your challenges after emancipation from foster care?
- Did you have mentors or adults who were available whenever you needed them?
- What were your educational goals? Did you graduate from high school? College? Earn a degree?
- Were you employed while in foster care? After emancipation? What types of jobs did you have?

Research Question 3

What were the factors that contributed to achievements, accomplishment of goals, and life satisfaction?

- As you reflect back, what are your thoughts about your foster-care experience?

- How did you achieve goals you set for yourself?
- How did you develop personal relationships?
- Did you reconnect with your family?
- What are your most important relationships now that you are a mature adult?
- What gave you sustenance and a sense of well-being when life was challenging?

The interviews were analyzed for common themes and in connection to the research questions. Several themes and subthemes were identified in each section to begin the coding and analysis. The themes for Question 1 were Positive Relationships with Parent/Trusted Adult and Family Responsibility. The themes for Question 2 were Adapting to Circumstances, and Independence, Self-Reliance, and Perseverance. The theme for Question 3 was Self-Determination and Perception of Self as a Survivor.

Data Analysis

I conducted interviews as the main source of data collection with the purpose of analyzing the data to find recurring themes. Creswell (2007) postulated "data collected in a narrative study need to be analyzed for the story they have to tell, the chronology of unfolding events, and turning points or epiphanies" (p. 155). To prepare the data for analysis, I performed the following steps: (a) listened to the interviews from the digital audio-recording; (b) read through all the transcribed interviews from the digital recordings; (c) created a file for each participants that consisted of the interview transcripts; and (d) recorded handwritten memoranda throughout the interviews for additional analysis. The files are located in my home office, locked in a desk drawer to which I have the only key.

Upon reading the transcribed copies of the interview recordings, I used the copies to begin the analysis in order to discover relevant themes that described participants' foster-care experiences during different time periods. The data revealed several common themes throughout the different sections of the interview process. The final step in the data analysis was the coding of the transcripts. I read and reread the transcriptions several times in coding the text into themes under the four major headings. I developed the codes by directly examining the data. I coded the data in descriptive words and category names. All data were segmented until the coding was completed. During coding, I kept a master list of all the codes developed in the research study. Inductive coding was used in examining the data. During the process, I was able to see similarities and differences in participants' perceptions of their foster-care experiences. The results that emerged from the data analysis are outlined in Chapter 4.

Background of Researcher

I am a middle-aged, African American woman who has been a social worker for 19 years and has worked for a social-services agency in the East Bay as a child-welfare worker for 15 years. I graduated from John F. Kennedy University (JFKU) with a BA degree with honors in 1991. I applied to the University of California-Berkeley prior to graduating from JFKU and earned a master's degree in social welfare in 1993. After graduating from the University of California-Berkeley, I worked as a clinical supervisor for a private nonprofit agency in San Francisco for 4 years. In addition to my full-time job, I was adjunct faculty at JFKU during the spring and winter semesters and taught several classes over a period of 3 years.

I worked in the Dependency Investigations Unit for the entire 15 years I was employed at the social-services agency. The responsibilities of the position provide latitude and some autonomy in making recommendations regarding placement and the best interest of the children within the law. I have always been sensitive that my responsibility as an African American child-welfare worker includes making decisions and recommendations that Black children be removed from their homes and families.

I applied to the University of San Francisco for personal reasons, but primarily because I observed firsthand that African American youth and families involved with the child-welfare system were negatively impacted in each decision-making process. Furthermore, the desire to conduct my own research from the perspective of an African American woman whose profession could be perceived as being part of the problem was uppermost in my decision to return to school. I was aware that my position as a child-welfare worker, an African American woman, and a researcher would put me in a very unique position, but I understood that I could also provide a different perspective from an "insider's" lens.

There is a dearth of studies on positive outcomes regarding mature women whose histories included foster care. There are even fewer studies on narratives of women of color who persevered despite foster care, and are living self-sustaining lives. Although most of the research has focused on foster youths' poor outcomes in almost every sector of their lives after emancipation, this study focused on the factors that influenced the six participants chosen for this study to persevere despite emancipating from foster care. I was intrigued by their level of seeming success in the face of daunting circumstances and

felt their narratives would contribute to research on experiences of women of color who had never been asked about their stories.

This study is an important contribution to the fields of social welfare, education, and sociology. The narratives of the participants in this study will bring visibility and voice to the women who survived foster care everywhere.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This study explored the factors that influenced the development of life-sustaining skills of mature women formerly in foster care in California. The intent was to explore those factors that influenced the resilience, motivation, determination, and strengths of women of color who defied the odds, given the largely poor outcomes for current and former youth in the foster-care system.

This chapter provides a description of the six participants in the study. Participants are discussed using their self-chosen pseudonym to offer anonymity. Findings from the study are presented by research questions and interview questions, designed to illuminate the major themes. This research was conducted using interview questions. The interview questions were divided into five subsections sections following participants' personal profiles and background information: (a) home life before entry into foster/kinship care, (b) foster/kinship experiences, (c) emancipation from foster care, (d) emerging adulthood, and (e) adulthood and life satisfaction.

Participants' Profiles and Background Information

Five African American women and one Mexican American woman participated in this study. The participants work in different capacities at a social-services agency in the East Bay area in northern California. The participants were encouraged to select their own pseudonyms. The participants chose to participate in this study for personal reasons and to bring awareness and a voice for youths currently and formerly in foster/kinship

care. Research on current and former foster youths show poor outcomes and all participants defied the odds.

At the time of the interviews, all participants had achieved their educational and personal goals. They were in well-paying positions and had been employed for many years. All were in long-term stable relationships with significant others or married. Five participants had children. Their ages ranged from 34 to 68 years. All six have siblings and two participants are sisters.

Table 2 provides a demographic overview of the profile of participants.

Table 2

Demographic Profile of Participants

Personal pseudonym	Race/ethnicity	Marital status	Age	Years employed	Children	Siblings
Survivor	Mexican American	Married	68	30	3	4
Buddha Nature	African American	Divorced/SO	68	20	3	1
Nurturer	African American	Single/SO	42	11	0	2
Resilient Overcomer	African American	Married	40	10	1	4
Warrior	African American	Single/SO	36	15	1	4
Protector	African American	Married	34	7	2	4

Note. SO = significant other.

Profile of Participants' Narratives

Based on guided questions, participants shared information divided into five categories after describing their personal backgrounds: (a) home life before entry into foster/kinship care, (b) experiences in foster/kinship care, (c) emancipation from foster/kinship care, (d) emerging adulthood, and (e) adulthood and life satisfaction. Below is a profile of each participant in order of her interview.

Survivor

Personal Background

Survivor and I met for interviews twice. The interviews were approximately 3 weeks apart and took place in the room set aside for the interviews. Survivor shared her experiences in a clear, calm voice. Survivor is 68 years old and when asked about her ethnicity, she said "okay, I'm Hispanic, that's my ethnicity." She is married and has three adult children, two sons who are married with children and a daughter who has made the Navy her career. She said that she has six living siblings out of a total of eight: four boys and four girls. She has worked at Alameda County for 30 years and her hobbies are reading, sewing, and watching television.

Life Before Entry Into Foster Care

Survivor was born into a monolingual Spanish-speaking family and learned to speak English when she entered kindergarten at the age of 6. Survivor was the second oldest girl in a family of eight siblings, four girls and four boys. The fourth youngest child, a girl, died in infancy but she did not know the cause of death. Both of Survivor's parents worked at menial jobs that barely supported the family, and they were often evicted because her father was an alcoholic and drank away the money for rent. She recalled that her mother would be anxiously waiting for her father to arrive home after being paid, and how upset she was when he did not come home to give her money to pay the rent. Her childhood was spent moving from place to place because the family was evicted and there was not enough money to pay for all the family's needs.

Survivor recalled that she had a warm loving relationship with her mother, and that she taught her to be self-sufficient and do things for herself. She was close to her

siblings and often had to take care of them when her mother worked. “My mother never complained.” She did what was necessary to feed Survivor and her other children.

Survivor was 10 years old when her mother died at age 30. Her mother died in a county hospital from tubercular meningitis after undergoing surgery, from a stroke after the surgery. She learned the cause of her mother’s death from the autopsy report she had requested after she reached adulthood. Survivor recalled that some of her siblings were taken into foster care and she and her older brother were sent to her aunt’s home. All the children were separated and sent to different foster homes. Survivor described being “devastated” after her mother’s death because “it was so unexpected” that “I shut down and simply went where I was told to go.” Although CPS removed the younger children, she didn’t remember whether she was officially involved with CPS.

Life in Foster/Kinship Care

Survivor described her experiences in her aunt’s home as “slave labor” because she explained, “my most basic needs were not met.” She said was not provided neither food nor given money for her feminine hygiene, lunch money for school, clothing or shoes, nor a decent place to sleep. She had to clean her aunt’s house, do all the family’s laundry, take care of her aunt’s child, go to the store, and babysit for her child. She received nothing in return. She went to school hungry and remembered being embarrassed because her stomach would growl from hunger. Her aunt would tell her to take her baby for a ride in the stroller in the evening and by the time she returned, the kitchen was closed down, there was no food to eat, because her uncle had already pulled the rollaway bed out and was asleep, “or pretended to be.” This situation happened night after night, and her aunt expressed little empathy for her even though Survivor was her

niece. She recalled that one of her friends would bring her a " little food," even though they were poor as well.

Foster-Care Experiences

When I asked Survivor about her removal from home, she corrected me and said, "You know, when you talk about removal, actually, I was not removed. I chose to go into foster care." I was surprised and asked her, "you *chose* to go into foster care?" Survivor's tone was very matter of fact as she responded,

> Yes, because I was living with my aunt and my needs were not being met. And so it was my choice. When I went to visit [my brother and sisters in foster care] and saw that they had three squares, they had a place to sleep, they were not worried, so then I asked [the social worker] if I could go into foster care and they said sure. And then afterwards I took my younger brother with me."

When Survivor entered foster care, three of her siblings were placed with her, but her youngest brother was placed into a different foster home and was eventually adopted.

Survivor remained in the foster home for 3 years after leaving her aunt's house. Survivor was sexually assaulted while in foster care and disclosed that she had never told anyone about the sexual assault, and that the interview was the first time she talked about it.

Survivor was 15 years old when she went to live with her father and older brother, who had been living with their father. While in foster care, she had no contact with him, but knew he was around at times. Her father rented an apartment for the three of them, and the situation took a turn for the worse almost immediately. Survivor's father stopped making payments on the refrigerator and stove, and the rental company took the appliances out of the apartment. They had no appliances to refrigerate their perishable food, nor a stove on which to cook.

The apartment manager evicted Survivor's father after he failed to pay the rent. However, he liked her brother and allowed them to move to another empty apartment in the complex rent-free. They had no heat, electricity, or furniture. They slept on pallets on the floor. The landlord told them that their father was not allowed to live in the apartment. A different aunt lived next door to the apartment, and she allowed Survivor's brother to rig up an extension cord to her house so they could have lights at night.

Somehow Survivor's former foster parent had made arrangements with the child-welfare agency and she received a small stipend of $37 dollars a month. Her father helped her out with $4 or $5 occasionally. She was only able to afford the bare essentials while trying to survive and subsist on very little. Despite it all, she continued to attend school and studied every night. The school she attended "had mostly White students, a small number of Hispanics and very few, if any, Blacks." She remembered that her counselor never talked to her about her future, but tried to direct her toward working in retail. "But I'm a rebel at heart." So she enrolled in accounting, shorthand, typing, and business classes to learn administrative skills. She always told her self that she could do it "because eventually I knew I was going to wind up going to nursing school."

Emancipation

When Survivor graduated from high school, the landlord came to the apartment and told her "okay, you done with school?" When she answered "yes", he told them "its time to go." Survivor was 17 years old when she graduated, and after being evicted, they somehow found her father, who was working at the time. He gave her money so she could rent a residential motel room for $8 a week. There was a community bathroom and shower, a stove to heat the room, and she and her father rented adjacent rooms.

Emancipation From Foster/Kinship Care

Survivor's brother joined the Air Force and sent her money to help pay the rent on the two rooms. She looked for work in the business sector because she had stenographic skills, but was not hired despite her skills and could only find a job in a pants factory. Soon thereafter, she fell in love with her future husband, who was in the Navy, and became pregnant. They married and began the next phase of her life as a married woman. While raising her family, Survivor continued to take classes and never let go of her dream to finish her education and become a nurse.

Emerging Adulthood

Survivor's husband was very traditional, and did not want her to go to school or work after they married. He felt that her role as his wife was to stay home and raise the children, even though he was often away from home because he was in the Navy. When her daughter was 5 years old and in kindergarten, she said "I find myself with all this time on my hands and I says, 'well, I got to do something.'" She lived close to College of Alameda; she enrolled in the Medical Assistant Program and took classes that were transferrable to a 4-year college, because "my plan was to get my degree in registered nursing." Even though she admitted that she did not perform well academically while in high school and was a "C" student, she proudly claimed, "even though that teacher was hard and he taught premed students, those of us in the program aced it!"

After completing the Medical Assistant Program, she graduated with an Associate of Science degree with a minor in business. Her husband was transferred to Washington and she was working in several positions part time, until a full-time position opened and her supervisor encouraged her to apply for the position as an administrator in social

services. At that point she was encouraged to pursue her registered nursing degree and key people in her office allowed her to change her schedule so that she could get to college, "and it all worked out."

She candidly admitted that she and her husband got into verbal disagreements about her returning to school. "He expected me to be like his mother, but I wasn't like his mother, and I am the boss of me, but I'm not the boss of me." Even though he objected, she worked around her husband's schedule and her children cooperated with her, so he never knew she was enrolled in nursing school until she graduated. Survivor earned her BSN degree and is a license Registered Nurse/Public Health Nurse (RN/PHN). It was then that her husband learned that she had defied his rules when she invited him to her graduation. She did not go into great detail about his reaction, but said she did what she had to do because she wanted more out of life. Over time, Survivor's husband eventually acknowledged that he was proud of her accomplishment and agreed that she had every right to get her education and work.

Adulthood and Life Satisfaction

Survivor's credits her mother with providing her the love and ability to persevere without giving up. She believed "when things happen to you, it happens for a reason." "I raised my children to be self-sufficient, with manners and morals." She encouraged and protected them but stressed education because "education is key to taking care of yourself. You have to depend on you."

Survivor's religion was very important to her throughout her life. She recalled crying out, and speaking to God "okay God, what do I do now?" She said somehow she

always found the strength and fortitude to keep going. She is a staunch Catholic, and is a member of the Catholic Church near her home. She raised her children in the church.

Over the years, Survivor searcher for and located her brothers and sisters who had been adopted. She initiated contact with them because "they are family." They visit and have gotten close over the years. Their lives growing up were quite different from hers, but when she said when they are together, they talk about the good times and don't stray too much into the past.

Survivor says she's at a time in her life when she is content and things are "alright." She reflected on the interview process and said that it made her think about how far she'd come and how much she had overcome because "look at me, I'm a survivor!"

Buddha Nature

Personal Background

Buddha Nature and I had two face-to-face interviews. Buddha Nature is a 68-year-old African American woman who was born in Dallas, Texas, but was raised in Richmond, California. Buddha Nature has one brother who was raised in the same foster home with her until the age of 14. She has been employed for 20 years at the social-services agency but has worked a total of 40 years. She was a Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN) for 5 years and later enrolled in nursing school and earned her BSN/PHN degree.

Buddha Nature is divorced but has been in a long-term relationship with her significant other for many years. Buddha Nature has three children, a son and daughter who are fraternal twins, and a younger son. For entertainment, Buddha Nature likes to read, travel, visit friends, and attend Red Hat Society meetings with her friends. She is

also a licensed foster parent and a Court Appointed Special Advocate for foster children. She and I have worked on many cases together and she is very committed to children in foster care. Buddha Nature is a soft-spoken woman of medium height who presented as very calm and at peace with her self and life in general. She spoke quietly in a thoughtful tone throughout the interviews.

Buddha Nature's experience is somewhat different in that she was not "formally" placed into foster care by the child-welfare agency in Texas, nor was she adopted by her foster parents, who raised her as their own. Her mother was only 14 years old when she was born, and had few resources to care for her. She said, "from what I've been told, my maternal grandmother was my primary caretaker when I was a baby and brought me to California when she and most of the family migrated here." Buddha Nature said she was told that her mother remained behind in Texas, and did not move to California until much later. Her biological family came to California because there was work in the shipyards, the post office, and automobile plants. Buddha Nature's biological grandmother initially provided childcare for her, but she and everyone in the family worked and found the responsibility of taking care of her difficult, so passed her on to an aunt to take care of her. Her aunt was working as well and put her in childcare. The woman who would later become her foster parent provided childcare for Buddha Nature full time after that.

Her aunt worked 7 days a week, and had no time for her. While explaining how she came to be raised by her foster parent, tears welled up in her eyes and she said,

> you know, this going to be real painful and they say you can't remember back that far—-but we lived in some low rental housing in the city of Berkeley. And I remember she asked my foster mom, "do you want a little girl?" and she gave me away."

Buddha Nature became very tearful and emotional at that point, and recalled, "I was two years old, but I've never forgotten those words." The researcher asked if she wanted to stop the interview, but she said she wanted to continue. She wiped her tears and quietly composed herself and continued her narrative.

Life in Foster Care

After she began living with her foster parents, they moved to Berkeley and tried to locate her mother through the department of social services because they wanted to adopt her. Her mother did not agree to her being adopted by her foster parents, but did not attempt to make contact with her. Despite the fact that she was never adopted by her foster parents, they gave Buddha Nature their last name anyway. She vaguely remembered that a social worker came to their house and did an evaluation, and she "thinks" her foster parents became her legal guardians, but she was never sure about that.

Her foster family received a lot of support from the Berkeley community and she recalled that "the neighborhood folks just took kids in. … A lot of my friends might have come from single family homes, or had lost a parent, or their grandmom was raising them, and it just wasn't a big deal." Buddha Nature's foster parents eventually bought a house in Richmond and she went to elementary, middle, and high school in Contra Costa County.

Buddha Nature revealed how she felt not knowing her mother and biological family. Her foster father worked in the post office, and told her that her maternal uncle also worked there, and knew that she lived with them. Throughout the years her uncle never attempted to contact her. She remembered feeling "hurt and bitter."

> I was mean and evil and felt like I don't want you to touch me and don't look at me. I was tough and I was bitter and hurt that they forgot all about me and didn't try to get me.

Her foster parents worked, so her foster mom's mother took care of Buddha Nature in the family home. She grew very close to her "and she was living there, you know, and taught me how to make doll clothes, we used to crochet little scarves and she gave me a lot of one-on-one."

Buddha Nature received love and attention from her foster mom's side of the family as well as encouragement from the neighborhood women. Unfortunately, shortly after moving to Richmond, California, her grandmother passed away. Buddha Nature recalls being devastated. She was included in the funeral arrangements and one of the morticians asked her if she were afraid of dead people. She told him "yes in my shaky little girl voice," and he took her hand, led her to the casket and told her, "you know what? If you touch her, she'll always be with you and you'll be able to get over it." The mortician took her hand and placed it on the dead woman's hand, and Buddha Nature told the researcher "I was okay with it after that. You know I missed her, but down through the years I can remember the happy times." The grandmother had died suddenly of a heart attack.

Buddha Nature described the neighborhood climate during that time, and remembered how the older women would take her under their wings. She became emotional as she recollected being taught how to make lemon pie, and while making the pie, she was answering questions about what she wanted to do with her life, and encouraged to "make something of yourself." She was invited to other neighbor's homes where she was taught how to sew, crochet, or prepare food. She said "I was being drawn out of my shell because I was shy, but by answering the women's questions, I listened

and learned and was given ‘old school’ advice.” Buddha Nature thoughtfully commented “it really does take a village to raise children and I was so fortunate to have had that.” All of the women stressed that she should think about her choices before she acted, and to stay in school and get her education. They had fewer opportunities and knew how difficult it could be for her as a Black woman.

Buddha Nature said she studied because her foster mother insisted that she do her best in school, “and get a good education” because she had only gone to the sixth grade herself. Her foster mother warned her about “have to dependent on your husband” and “not having your own money to spend.” She remembered being very shy in elementary school, because she felt different, and didn’t look like anyone in her foster parent’s family. She remembered people “looking at me cause I was tall and skinny with long pigtails and asking my foster mom, where did you get that little girl? She don’t look Black, she looks Indian.” She said she always felt she didn’t belong and never fit in. She recalled that she was called “teacher’s pet” in school because the teachers tried to help her overcome her shyness and let her take the roll call or take things to the office. She said she did “okay” in elementary and junior high school but remembered one male teacher who told her that she would probably “marry the boss” and she remembered thinking, “that’s not what I want.”

Buddha Nature recalled her foster father always telling her that if she read, “you can go anywhere you want to go.” She resisted the idea of marriage because he seemed to expect that she would marry and settle down and vowed to herself, “I’m getting out of here one day.” She said she has always loved to read and would take books to her room

and “read and read and read.” She said “reading opened up another world to me that I didn’t know existed.” She also admitted that reading was a form of escape for her.

Buddha Nature revealed that she was making plans to “ get on up outta here” and leave her foster parent’s home. She said her foster parents were very strict even as they instilled values in her. When she enrolled in college, she acknowledged that initially, she did not apply herself, but observed that her friends were talking about getting married, and marriage held no interest to her. While in college, her foster mother’s father, who lived in Jackson, Mississippi, sent her $100. She knew that the money he’d sent was a lot for that time, and not wanting to disappoint him or herself, began to apply herself. She changed schools and got serious about becoming a nurse.

She switched to Laney College and enrolled in the LVN program. She had taken classes in business and administrative skills but realized she never really liked to do that, and was more interested in caring for animals and people. She made up her mind and worked to earn extra to enough money to pay for the LVN program. Buddha Nature worked two jobs to pay the tuition, but her goal was to ultimately become a RN. She said that the teachers were pushing Black students to work toward their LVN rather than toward an RN, and she did not plan to settle.

Buddha Nature recalled that she had minimal contact with a social worker, but when she did come to her foster parent’s home, she seemed interested in her. For instance, she saw that Buddha Nature needed braces, and arranged for her to receive services from an orthodontist. She wore braces for 6 years. The social worker she remembered was a White woman, and when she visited, she asked her about school and her plans for her education. “She seemed interested in what I wanted to do in my life.”

The social worker also made sure that she had books. She also recalled that it was around that time that her foster mother began to take in other foster kids and that the kids would be switched every 6 months, but left Buddha Nature in the home. She didn't think her foster parents received much financial assistance from the social-service agency, even though they were just making do. Her foster parents made sure she had what she needed in supplies for school so she could participate, but she knew that they did not have money for extras.

Emancipation From Foster Care

Buddha Nature decided she was going to be on her own after receiving a beating from her foster father for coming home after 12 midnight when she was almost 18. She said her foster father had always been very strict and told her that if a girl was out past midnight, then she "must be doing something she shouldn't be doing." She admitted feeling rebellious and remembers thinking, "one day I'm going to do what I want to do." After the beating took place, she graduated from high school and enrolled in college, and was employed.

She met a woman she liked and with whom she was compatible, so they rented an apartment together after graduation. She moved out of her foster parent's house and "never went back." She liked the independence and freedom of being on her own. While working and going to school she said "I was determined to live the way I wanted to live, eat when and what I wanted to eat, and do what I wanted to do without anyone telling me I couldn't." She explained that she did not behave wildly, but was determined to lead her own life as she wanted. As her self-confidence grew, she said "I knew it came from a place of anger, internal drive and positive feedback from the ladies in the neighborhood."

When she was in her early 20s, Buddha Nature worked in San Francisco for a Black doctor from Howard University, who encouraged her to return to school and pursue her degree to become an RN. She recalled that Dr. Coleman was also an attorney and had a law degree, "because he told me if he were to do an exam on a White patient, and the patient reported him for whatever reason, he knew he would more than likely be questioned, and wanted to ready on all counts." Racism was prevalent during that time and Black doctors were a rarity. Dr. Coleman had purchased the building that was situated on Third Street in San Francisco. Black doctors and dentists rented space in the building and provided services for the Black community. Buddha Nature said she was "overjoyed to see so many Blacks making it" and was determined to do so herself. Everyone encouraged her to return to school so she cut down on her hours and enrolled in nursing school fulltime.

Between the ages 23 and 24, Buddha Nature married and became pregnant with twins. At that time, she didn't know she was going to have twins, but after they were born she learned her foster father had told Buddha Nature's uncle that she had had twins. Her maternal grandmother "called me out of the blue and asked if she could come to Berkeley to see me and the twins." Buddha Nature was surprised to learn that there were twins on the maternal side of her family. She and her grandmother discussed the past, and eventually became very close. Her grandmother helped raise her children while she completed nursing school. Over time, she got to know the maternal side of her family but still harbored hurt that they had not contacted throughout the years even though they knew where she was. Over time, she met her biological mother and was able to tell her

how she felt about being given away. “It had bothered me for so long that it felt good to get it out.”

Adulthood and Life Satisfaction

She eventually came to terms with her issues surrounding her mother’s family and was surprised to learn that her mother never had any more children, but “always had a houseful of somebody’s kids.” She realized that she and her mother shared many of the same traits and looked alike. As an example, Buddha Nature was an avid bowler and bowled in many leagues through the years, as did her mother. Even though they went through some rough times, the family worked things out. She shared a lovely black and white picture of her mother with me and I could clearly see the resemblance. She said she was happy that she was able to finally get to know her family and feels much better because family is extremely important to her. She feels connected in a way she had not before, and with that connection came peace of mind.

Buddha Nature is a proud Black woman and is a strong advocate for children. She is very close to her own children but does not have any grandchildren. However, she has been a Court Appointed Special Advocate for foster children and need a positive, caring adult in their lives. She is a licensed foster parent and her life continually revolves around children in one way or another. She does not plan to retire soon and is enjoying life to the fullest now.

Buddha Nature and I talked informally about religion and spirituality as the second interview was nearing an end, and I mentioned that her pseudonym too closely resembled her true name. I asked if she wanted to think about some other name that fit her, yet one with which she felt comfortable. I asked how she perceived herself, based on

her experiences, her life, her nature, and given what she had shared during the interviews. She quietly reflected before replying and slowly said, “I guess I could be a spiritual person without being connected to a set religion or whatever, or something, you know what I’m trying to say … my nature … is just a Buddha nature.” We looked at each other and smiled at the same time and both of us said, “That’s it.” And that is how Buddha Nature chose her pseudonym.

Nurturer

Personal Background

Nurturer and I met in the conference room at the social-services agency on two Saturday mornings for our interviews at a time convenient for both of us. The agency is closed weekends but Nurturer has keys to the building. I began the interview by asking about her personal background.

Nurturer is a 42-year-old African American woman, who thinks there might be Native American ancestry on her mother’s side. There is no family historian to confirm Native ancestry, but she thinks there might be from things she has heard from other family members when she was younger. Nurturer was born in Richmond, Virginia, and has two sisters, ages 29 and 37 years old. Nurturer works in a high-level position at the social-services agency and has been employed there for 12 years. She is single, and has no children. Nurturer is involved in a new relationship and she and I did not talk about her future with the new person.

Nurturer loves to read for entertainment, but recognizes that she should get out more, because she is too content to stay at home. She admits to being a homebody, but will occasionally go shopping with girlfriends. She is reluctant to travel, and wants to, but

her friends are either married or in relationships and she isn't comfortable doing things alone. Routines are important in her life and she is very much aware that she needs routine because she did not have that after the age of 6.

Nurturer presented as calm, articulate, collected, and at ease with me. She elaborated when needed but was always open and honest in answering my questions and maintained her poise and professionalism throughout the interview.

Life Before Entry Into Foster Care

Nurturer lived with her mother and two sisters in Los Angeles County after they moved from Richmond Virginia. Her mother had married her middle sister's father and he moved with them to Los Angeles. Nurturer and her sisters all have different fathers, but her stepfather was the only man her mother married. However, he was a heroine addict and very abusive to her mother, but not to them. Nurturer witnessed domestic violence between her mother and her mother's husband often, and she made no secret of her dislike for him. She talked about how her feelings about him created friction between her and her mother, who thought Nurturer was mean to him. She revealed that in spite of the fact that he was abusive, he provided for the family, even though he did not have a job. "He was a hustler. He didn't sell drugs, but would go downtown to Skid Row in downtown LA and come back with money."

Before Nurturer's mother became addicted to crack cocaine, she said she was the only child for 6 years, and her mother instilled in her the desire to succeed early on. She challenged her to do her best in everything and Nurturer felt safe and secure. They lived in a nice apartment in Virginia and her mother worked at Phillip Morris cigarette factory and was doing well. They had friends, and she recalled, " I saw the best part of my

mother and have more positive memories of her than my sisters." The values that were instilled in her took root and Nurturer never forgot her mother's expectations of her. Her mother had a friend who was church-going woman and she took Nurturer under her mentorship and appointed herself her godmother. Nurturer was introduced to Christ early in life and "I have my own relationship with Him." She recalls going to church each Sunday by herself and the women in the church also took her in and guided and supported her. She remembers that she was about 12 at the time.

After her mother and her mother's husband moved to southern California, things in the home spiraled out of control, and Nurturer tried to hold herself together and her sisters together but also tried to escape by becoming involved in every activity offered in school. Even though her mother's husband was an addict himself, he tried to warn her against using crack cocaine. She told him to stay out of her business and began what became a lifelong addiction to the drug.

Nurturer said "my mother had always smoked weed in the home; she didn't do it in front of me even though I was aware that she did smoke, and it was no big deal to me." Her mother admonished her not to do it, and made sure she was not in the room when she smoked, but it was no secret. However, her mother started smoking crack cocaine soon after meeting Gina, a woman who had a baby that she often left in Nurturer's care. Nurturer was providing care for her siblings as well as Gina's child and "didn't understand why Gina did not care for her own child."

Nurturer described the time when she woke up and went into the kitchen to get a glass of water. Half asleep, she looked into the dining room, which was adjacent to the kitchen, and saw her mother smoking something "that smelled unlike anything I'd ever

smelled." She said her mother got very angry with her and demanded that she return to her room. From that point on, the situation deteriorated so quickly that the family was evicted within a couple of months. Her mother lost her job because she stopped working and was completely addicted to crack cocaine. The family ended up staying in squalid motels in an undesirable part of town, and life as Nurturer knew it changed forever.

Although she tried not to let on how bad things were in the home, the dean of students noticed that Nurturer's demeanor had changed and made inquiries out of concern. Nurturer told the dean about the family's situation, and the dean informed her that she was a mandated reporter and was required by law to call CPS for her and her siblings' protection. Nurturer did not know what to expect at the time, but only knew that things were so bad that she needed to get help for herself and her sisters.

Life in Foster Care

After she and her siblings were removed from their mother, they were separated and she was placed in a foster home quite a distance from her school. Although the foster mother tried to make her feel welcome, Nurturer vividly recalled feeling so traumatized and unsafe in that strange environment that she refused to take off her coat or clothing and slept fully dressed on the edge of the bed, "with my trash bags beside me, thinking, no, I'm not staying here. I'm not even taking my stuff off. … It don't even matter." That placement lasted 2 weeks. When, she couldn't take it any longer she went to the dean of students again and told her she wasn't going to return to that foster home. The dean called CPS again, and a social worker came to the school and moved her and all of her belongings to her second placement. At that time, Nurturer knew where her mother lived and visited her with the foster parent's knowledge. But the social worker was not aware

she was visiting her mother “and I guess I didn’t have permission to see my mom” because “when she found out she moved me to another foster home and blamed the foster parent, claiming that she did not have any control over me.”

Nurturer lived in three foster homes within the first year. Her third and last placement was in a group-home-like setting, with three girls in two bedrooms. Nurturer felt that the placement was good and that the foster parent did the best she could. “She provided stability for me and she did the best she could.”

Nurturer continued to attend high school, but was not allowed to see her mother or sisters on a regular basis. Her younger sibling, with whom she was very close, and who she had practically raised from the time she was an infant, was placed with foster parents who were not cooperative in following through on visits approved by the social worker. She recalled that when she arrived for a scheduled visit her social worker had set up, the foster parents did not answer the door when she arrived at the house. Nurturer’s middle sister had a very difficult time in foster care, and she had even less contact with her throughout the years. She disclosed that both her sisters have emotional problems as a result of their experiences in foster care, that they got pregnant in their teens, were on welfare, and had other issues related to being in foster care.

During high school, Nurturer stayed active in extracurricular activities and continued as a cheerleader, joined the debate and speech teams, performed leadership, was on the yearbook team, and ultimately became student-body president. She admitted to overcompensating in an effort to “seem like everybody else.” However, she also worked the entire time she was in high school to support herself and pay her own dues because she had no parent to pay for her. She said all the teachers knew she was in foster

care but she did not care if the adults knew, "because I needed help and they did things for me." She has good memories of Crenshaw High because the teachers made sure that she knew about events that broadened her horizons and that she got what she needed to take advantage of opportunities. Nurturer credits a White woman advisor at Crenshaw High School for helping her navigate the application process in preparation for college. She was accepted at the University of California-Santa Barbara, and scholarships paid for her the entire 4 years she was a student there.

Emancipation From Foster Care

During college, Nurturer worked the entire 4 years while an undergraduate at University of California-Santa Barbara. Although her tuition was paid by scholarships during the semester, she worried constantly about where she was going to live during holidays and summer months. She worked three jobs to support herself, but ended up sleeping on her former foster mother's daughter's floor during the summer of her first year in college. The foster mother had told her she could come and stay at her house during the summer in the beginning, but changed her mind. Her adult daughter had a couch that Nurturer could have slept on, but she told her she had to sleep on the floor. She said "at that point, I said never again would I allow myself to rely on anybody or ever sleep on anyone's floor again." She stayed away from the house for the most part, and only slept and showered there because she felt she was a burden.

Nurturer rented an apartment with three roommates her second year of college, but still had to continually work during the summer months to pay all of the rent after her roommates left to be with their families. Nurturer described herself as a "hustler" because "I was constantly on the grind … so I still had to work, had to work, had to work." She

worked all through college and was promoted to assistant manager at McDonald's restaurant by the time she was 18 years old. She graduated from University of California-Santa Barbara, decided to enroll at Golden Gate Law School, and "hated every minute of it."

Nurturer wanted to remain in California to be near her sisters, so she did not try to apply to Tulane University or colleges in the South because they were too far away. She found that Golden Gate Law School did not have the sense of community she enjoyed at University of California-Santa Barbara, and the students at Golden Gate Law School were "mostly older, commuter adults." In addition, she was doing social work at a group home at Berkeley Academy and realized that she really liked working with youths: "This was what I was supposed to be doing." She ultimately applied to San Francisco State's master of social work program and was accepted. She continued to work at a social-serves agency while in graduate school, but she would often travel to southern California to visit her sisters and check on them.

Nurturer and I met for the second interview, and she shared that she had followed up on the information her mother had told her about her grandmother and that she had located her in Utah. She described the process she went through in locating not only her grandmother, but other family members as well. She showed me pictures of her family, a video recording of her meetings with her grandmother, and we spent quite a bit of time discussing her family, the process she had gone through and how she felt about it. Her grandmother has been living in Utah since 2001, cared for by strangers who did not think she had any family. Her grandmother, at age 89, had mellowed, according to Nurturer,

but she was still "feisty" even though she'd had a stroke from which she had not fully recovered.

The first part of the interview was very emotional for Nurturer as she showed me the video of her grandmother who was "everyone's favorite" in a facility that had no Black people. The video was compelling and I enjoyed watching it with Nurturer. She spent 3.5 days in Utah and learned much about herself. She explained to me that she felt "God puts us where we need to be." The trip to Utah brought enlightenment, pain, sorrow, understanding, love, and closure to Nurturer. She stays in touch with her grandmother weekly and talks to the staff about her needs.

Emerging Adulthood

Nurturer and I resumed the second interview. Nurturer said that as she entered adulthood and into middle age, she continually worked and ultimately earned her master's in social welfare. She admitted she started working for the county because "I wanted a union job that I couldn't be fired from and a stable source of income and I needed a job that was permanent." She started working at the county as a child-welfare worker, and was instrumental in suggesting that the agency make needed changes and improve services for families and children. Over the years Nurturer was promoted to supervisor, then program manager, and is now division director. She has used her experience as a former foster youth to impress on upper management the importance of visitation between children and their parents "because the parents forget their kids and the kids need their parents!" Nurturer brought attention to other areas affecting foster youths that needed to be addressed, and upper management took notice. She disclosed to me that she "never thought I would be in the position I'm currently in, and I thought I'd

only be a supervisor." She takes her job seriously, and is ever aware that she is in a unique position to make positive changes in the lives of foster children. Therefore, her expectations are that child-welfare workers will do the best they can and make every effort to work with children and their families in a respectful and professional manner.

She sees herself as a Nurturer because she has always been the person who cared for others, and realized that she has a gift for giving of herself to those who are in need. She says she is a nurturer by nature, and as we spoke about the pseudonym that best suited her, she had no problem choosing the pseudonym, Nurturer.

Throughout the years, Nurturer has searched for, located, and reestablished contact with most of her family members, particularly her sisters. She was instrumental in getting them all together, recently located her grandmother, and shared that the 3 days spent with her were "wonderful," "warm," and "healing" days she will always remember. She has come full circle and feels she has made peace with everyone at this point in her life.

Nurturer has a deep abiding spiritual belief that God put her in places and situations where she needed to be and honestly admits that she could not have done it without God's grace. She has prayed for herself and believes there were people who prayed for her. She has endured, and expressed humility and is respectful of the gifts she has received and freely passes them on to those who need them most, the children in foster care.

Resilient Overcomer

Personal Background

Resilient Overcomer is a 40-year-old African American woman who was born in San Bernardino, California. She is newly married to her second husband, and has a 9-year-old daughter, who lives with her husband and her. Resilient Overcomer is a supervisor at the social-services agency and has worked there for 11 years. She has three siblings on her mother's side and 23 half siblings on her father's side. She knows very little about their experiences or living situation while growing up, but is in touch with five siblings through Facebook. She exercises, spends time with her husband and daughter, and listens to music for entertainment.

Life in Foster Care

Resilient Overcomer and I met twice for the interviews. She was very open and matter of fact about sharing her life story and was quite articulate, entertaining, and funny at times. During the first interview, she shared that her story was "likely to be different from the others, but I'm going to tell it like it is!" She stated right from the beginning that she was *told* by "my mom who raised me" that "she got me when I was 17 months old." She was clear that she was not removed from her mother and father by any agency and that her foster mom never received or applied for any money to take care of her. She said that she has no memory of her life before her father brought her to live with her foster mom, but the family historian told her that she did not react to anyone, and "that I just looked" until she was about 4 years old. Her foster mom said she never talked or cried, and had a flat affect.

The story she related that was passed on to her when she was old enough to question was that her mother was actively prostituting at that time, and her father was her mother's pimp. They came to her foster mom's home one day and said "I got a baby for you to raise." Her foster mother's biological son had graduated from college, and she was taking care of her own mother at that time. According to the story related to her, Resilient Overcomer's own mother never said a word, as her pimp, Resilient Overcomer's father, whose name was "Gun," made arrangements for her foster mother to provide childcare for her, and offered to pay $50 a week. He said he would pay her every week and gave her a large sum of money right then so that the foster mother could purchase the basic necessities for her. Resilient Overcomer said that "I knew my mom that raised me loved me and she took excellent care of me. I was the only child there and even though she was strict, I knew she loved me."

She stayed with her godmother for about "6 or 8 months" after leaving her foster mother's home, but she said "I became a financial hardship and she was told me I had to leave. I was about 11/12 years old and in the sixth grade." While living with various relatives, neighbors, and fictive kin, Resilient Overcomer attended nine elementary schools. She continued to excel in school "and I don't know how I did it." She said she was very bright and received accolades and praise from her teachers and simply adapted to every new situation. If she missed school she caught up with the assignments and was always at the top of her class in whatever school she attended. She was always aware that "home" was with her foster mother, and it was she that Resilient Overcomer called when her life got out of control: "There was a period of time when I didn't see my mother for over 2 years and I was worried about her, but tried to suppress it. I couldn't tell anybody

about it so I kept it inside." Resilient Overcomer said that talking about her experiences was "therapeutic and refreshing to discuss where you came from, to reflect upon where you are now. And so my story, I'll tell anybody about my story and its just a layer of who I am."

Resilient Overcomer said

> I understand now that my mother had a very difficult life in childhood and that she did not have a relationship with her own mother growing up. Her mother grew up in foster care and was sexually molested by her foster father. Her foster father was a preacher in the church and after she was molested, she ran away and that was how she got into prostitution.

She also talked about how she understood why her mother did not parent her or her siblings "from my perspective as social worker." "But I was still hurt because she mother did not give me the love and nurturing I feel like I deserved." As she explained to the researcher,

> I have an understanding now that I'm older. No one ever loved her or embraced her, and she didn't know how to give it out. I wonder what kind of life I might have had if I had been raised by my mother. I fantasized about that sometimes.

After Resilient Overcomer returned to her foster mother's home, she continued to go to school and discussed her plans for college. She always knew that she was going to go to college because her foster mother made it clear that's what she intended for her to do.

> But I had it in me, I never wanted to be on welfare, or be a teen mom, or any of that stuff. I knew I was going to go to college because I was always smart and people and teachers told me I was smart.

She spoke about feeling different because she was not with her mother but understood that being with her mother was not an option if she planned to succeed. Her foster mother made sure she was on birth control pills even though she was not, at that time, sexually active.

Emancipation From Foster Care

Resilient Overcomer said that she was told to leave by her foster mother on her18th birthday because she went out with her friends to celebrate, and did not return home until 2 o'clock in the morning.

> I'm thinking I'm grown, didn't call nobody, know it's a school night, so I rolled up with my boyfriend and came to the front door. The door is locked, but the lights were on. I rang the doorbell, no answer. I think I saw her look out the window, then the lights went off.

She knew then that her foster mother had no intention of allowing her back into the house so she left with her boyfriend and called her foster mother the following morning. Her foster mother told her that she was disrespectful, did not follow the rules of the house, and since she thought she was grown, to come and get all her belongings, and "figure it out." She was on her own from that point on, and did not return to live with her foster mom. She would visit and said she loved her dearly, but did not want to go back.

After being told to leave her foster mother's house, Resilient Overcomer stayed with her best friend until graduation. Then she moved in with her older brother, who allowed her to drive his car, and she felt she had the freedom she was denied while living with her foster parent. Even before she was out on her own, Resilient Overcomer had people who took an interest in her and she always had a job or volunteered. While in high school, she worked at Fairyland, the Gap, Miller's Outpost, and was also involved in school activities. She was a cheerleader, played on the softball team, was a member in the drama club, on the yearbook committee, and the student government committee. "I had a good experience at Castlemont."

Resilient Overcomer "kicked it" for 3 years after graduation although she had been accepted at several colleges prior to graduation. She readily admitted that she was

having so much fun that she did not want to go to school. She hung out with friends her own age, did what she wanted, and thought she was living like an adult. She lived with her boyfriend, who provided for her material needs, and "I got used to that lifestyle."

Emerging Adulthood

She eventually realized that she was wasting her life and was not living up to her potential. She and her boyfriend broke up and she enrolled at California State University-East Bay and majored in sociology. While in college as an undergraduate, Resilient Overcomer began to realize she wanted to do something for her community, to give back. Initially she wanted to open a group home for girls, but also realized that if she wanted to be a social worker as she planned, after graduating she would have to go to graduate school. Meanwhile she worked in the community and had an internship as a case manager at a program that helped reduce the infant-mortality rate by working with pregnant mothers. She was later recommended to other agencies that hired her to work in high schools and conduct workshops for teen-pregnancy prevention. She recalled that the work was very rewarding and still has good memories about that time in her life.

After graduating from California State University-East Bay, Resilient Overcomer applied to the University of California-Berkeley to attain a master's in the social-welfare program. " I knew I wasn't going to stop with a BA degree, so I applied at [the University of California-Berkeley] and I got in and was a Title IV E recipient." The experience at University of California-Berkeley was a good one for her and she excelled in social work and graduated with a 3.68 grade-point average. While at the University of California-Berkeley, her internship involved working the "front end" in the Emergency Response Unit at an Alameda County social-services agency. She related that her mindset regarding

CPS was that they took women's babies and she "wanted to help people, not police them." She did not like the front end, but the experiences changed her perspective about CPS and she realized she could be of benefit as a social worker. She was hired right after graduation and worked in long-term foster care, but requested a transfer after a year.

At some point, Resilient Overcomer got engaged and married her boyfriend with whom she lived. She eventually got pregnant with her only child, and requested a transfer because her workload in long-term foster care was exhausting and she had a huge caseload. She ultimately transferred to adoptions, where she remains and is a supervisor in that unit.

Adulthood and Life Satisfaction

As Resilient Overcomer and I talked about facets of her life that left indelible marks, I asked her what plans she had for her daughter and whether she raised her differently from the way she was raised? She immediately said, "well, for one there aren't any pimps and whores around." Then she elaborated to explain

> I will always come back. My daughter does not have to worry about me leaving and never returning like my mama did. I am very affectionate with my daughter, because I didn't get any overt affection from my foster mother or my biological. But she's from the old school and I understand that showing love meant providing for my needs, seeing that I had everything I needed for school, and taking care of me. Yeah, she was love in that way, but all the hands-on type of mushy gushy love, no I didn't get that, but my daughter does get that.

As Resilient Overcomer continued to reflect on her colorful and interesting life, she mused that the women who guided her through different times in her life were instrumental in shaping her outlook on life. The mentoring given to her added a depth to her understanding about herself and her mother's life, and she believes that "all you got to do is believe that you can achieve." She said just one person who believes in you, and helps you set goals for yourself will provide the impetus within you to achieve your

dreams. She did not feel that any men helped her achieve her goals because she did not recall any positive men in her life other that her foster father, who she was close to. Her second husband is the most important man in her life now and they are friends as well as marriage partners. She has kept no secrets from him and their relationship is trusting and supportive.

Resilient Overcomer is satisfied with her life now. She is content, is close to her siblings, and has a relationship with her biological mother. Her daughter has a very close relationship with her foster mom and has a relationship with her biological mother. She spends time with each of them and Resilient Overcomer likes that her daughter has the best of both worlds.

Resilient Overcomer and her mother talk, but are not as close as she would have liked. However, she is very philosophical about their relationship and feels she has come full circle. She feels some guilt about not going to church more often, and we discussed the difference between religion and spirituality. She has a deep belief in a power greater than herself, but is not a "gung-ho church member." "When I am troubled, I gets that bible out and reads a passage and feels that everything will work out fine."

When I asked Resilient Overcomer how she perceived herself, and the pseudonym that she felt best described her, she immediately said "resilient" and "overcomer": Resilient and overcomer because I used what I had and didn't make excuses."

Warrior

Personal Background

Warrior and I scheduled two interviews in the room set aside for that purpose. Warrior is a 35-year-old African American woman and has worked for Alameda County

since 1997. She has four sisters and two brothers and she is the second of six children. Warrior has a 4-year-old son and loves being with him and her family. She is involved in a long-term relationship with her son's father. Warrior is pursuing a degree in criminal justice and was scheduled to graduate in September 2012. She plans to continue her education and ultimately earn her master's degree in counseling. Warrior is "on a mission to help families and children who are part of the system." During the interview she was very forthright and direct about her experiences in foster care, and it was clear that she had really thought about how the foster-care system impacted her and her family. She expressed gratitude that she had been asked to participate in the researcher's study and wanted to "let people to know how things really were."

Life Before Entry Into Foster Care

Warrior recalled that she and her siblings grew up in a house where drugs were sold and used, and her grandmother was the drug dealer. They lived with her grandmother, mother, and six children. Her father had moved to Texas and she had no contact with him after he left. When Warrior was 12 years old, CPS removed her and her siblings from their mother after the police raided their house. However she and her younger sister were later returned to the "same situation" about a month later. They were all split up at that point. Her younger sister was placed in foster care, her brother went to a group home, and another sister stayed with other relatives. At that time, social workers did not require that families be fingerprinted, so after a month, they were returned to their grandmother after her mother threatened "to tell" social workers about her being a drug dealer. After she was placed back in her grandmother's home, she "lost" her house and moved away. CPS placed Warrior and her siblings with her aunt and uncle after their

grandmother moved away. She described the experience living with them as "horrible" because her relatives did not allow them to have contact with their mother and the conditions in the apartment were crowded and "really bad."

Life in Foster/Kinship Care

Warrior vividly recalled the living situation at her aunt and uncles' home and said "they were getting $2,000 for my siblings and me, and their two kids and we lived in a two bedroom, roach infested apartment that they weren't paying rent for, so you tell me where the money went." The social workers did not check in with Warrior or her siblings to ask them how things were going, and she said her aunt would report things about her that were untrue. For instance, her aunt called the social worker and told her that Warrior was "uncontrollable and wild" and that she would "probably end up pregnant." She said, "I am 36 years old and have a 4-year-old son. What does that tell you?"

Warrior stayed with her aunt and uncle for about 3 years. She cared for her siblings and tried to intervene and made sure that they were not mistreated too badly by her aunt, who Warrior claimed did not care for her mother. She said that her aunt could not control Warrior's younger sister, so she was her sister's primary caretaker, even though she was only 12 at the time. Her aunt was often verbally abusive to her and she did not attempt to hide her frustration that she was their caretaker. Her aunt blamed her mother for them being placed in her home, so "the situation was not pleasant."

After leaving her aunt's house, she returned to get her little sister. Apparently her aunt called CPS and all of them were removed and separated from that point on. Warrior was 15 years old at the time. Warrior recalled that her aunt lied to her brother and told him he was going to camp, but instead, he was placed in a group home. Her other sister

was also placed into a group home, but her aunt and uncle kept her baby sister with them. They were sent to live in Richmond, Berkeley, East Oakland, and North Oakland foster homes, respectively. Warrior expressed guilt and sadness that she had asked her cousin to take care of her little sister because she had started working and couldn't afford childcare. "She was maybe 10 at the time and that's how she ended up living with my cousin and to this day I hate that I did that. I should have figured out another way."

Warrior said she had no relationship with the White social workers and felt she and her siblings were just kids on their caseload, and that they, as children or people, had no meaning to them. She felt that they thought that she and her siblings would end up pregnant on welfare and made little or no effort to get to know them as individuals or human beings. Her mother's Family Reunification social worker listened to her aunt and uncle rather than assessing for her self if Warrior's mother was ready to have Warrior and her siblings returned to her. Her aunt and uncle told the social worker that she was not ready to have her children returned and said she was still using drugs. Warrior remembered how upset and hurt she and her mother were when they were informed in court that they weren't going to be returned to her. She said that, as they walked to the elevator, her mother said, "I feel like using." Warrior told her, "But you're not. You're stronger than that and we're not going to let them win." She said her mother did not use drugs and worked harder to get her siblings back.

Warrior's siblings were finally returned to their mother after another 6 months, with the help of an African American social worker. Warrior recalled

> my aunt were so mad at my mom because she got her kids back. They did not want her to get them back. But she did. They never thought she would. I told my mom, you got to give back momma. So her mother is raising her cousin's son and has had him since he was 5 years old, and he's 13 now.

Emancipation From Foster Care

Warrior and I were talking about how or if her life changed after foster care, and she said that she had assumed an adult role from

> from the time I was 5 years old. I was the sister, the mother, the friend, the cousin … everything, because I was taking care of everybody. I only had a little bit of myself, cause it was never really about me.

She went into foster care when her grandmother moved to Fresno, and her grandmother made it clear that she had no intention of inviting her along. She was in foster care until she emancipated at age 18.

Warrior worked but did not like school very much. She knew she was smart, but was more invested in taking care of her siblings, so she did not graduate, but earned her General Education Degree after dropping out of high school. However, she enrolled in college in 1996, but only attended "on and off" because she had been out for so long and did not fit in with her peers. "They were wild! And they didn't have a lot going on." Warrior acknowledged that she was a procrastinator, but found it difficult to study, when she knew her brother and sisters were still in foster care.

Prior to leaving foster care, Warrior learned about the Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP) before she emancipated. She found out for herself the steps she needed to take to get services and was able to take advantage of resources that were available to her. She was encouraged to apply for a position at the social-services agency after she got her own apartment and was hired as a temporary worker in 1997. Transitional housing funding was provided from the ILSP and she rented an apartment in Moraga and immediately petitioned the court to get her younger sister out of foster care. Warrior asked that CPS allow her younger sister be placed with her. They lived together for about a year until she, too, emancipated. Warrior ultimately purchased the foster home she had

been placed in when she was about 22 years old. She recalled after she began to work for the county, one of the social workers who had been assigned to her asked her how she bought her house? She smiled as she related how "I looked in her face and told her, 'just like everybody else. I worked, I went to the bank, got a loan and got my house. Just like everybody else.'" She said none of the social workers ever did anything to help her and her siblings, and that "they let us know that they expected us to get pregnant and become part of the system. We fooled all of them because we believed in ourselves, but they did nothing for us."

Emerging Adulthood

Warrior reflected that growing up, there was always an adult who was in their lives who pushed them to succeed. She said she did not use her situation as an excuse not to do her best, but did have someone who cared for her and her siblings to this day. She had observed over time that the kids growing up in foster care now "don't always get that push. They feel worthless and then come in the system and they're beaten down." Warrior also discussed that she felt that she had come full circle and is grateful for everything in her life.

Warrior was candid about coming to terms with her relationship with her father and said, "we got it all out, and both of us cried and hugged and made up and I was healed." She did say that she had more hard feelings toward her mother than her father, but they are close now and "talk just about everyday." While discussing the past with her father, she learned that her father had attempted to contact social services many times to find out where she and his other kids were, but never received a response from the social

worker. She did not know that he even thought about her and her siblings, and felt better that he had made the effort to check on them.

Warrior said that she has always had a special person in her life, her godmother, Terri, who loved her and all her siblings. Terri accepted them, introduced them to things they would have never known about had she not taken the time to show them another environment. Terri was aware that Warrior's mother was in crisis and used drugs, but

> she never made us feel ashamed or bad. She just took us in, and we'd go to her house and do homework, and she invested so much in us, I never wanted to disappoint her. She was always positive and never said one word about my mother. We could call Terri anytime day or night and she would be there, no questions asked. So Terri is like my second mom, and I don't know how I could have made it through like I did if it hadn't been for her.

Adulthood and Life Satisfaction

Warrior reflected on the fact that she had come full circle. Although she knew the value of education, it wasn't until she had a child that she invested in herself, applied to the Phoenix Program, and told her counselor right away that she needed her hand held because she was very aware that she was a procrastinator. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and plans to pursue her master's degree in counseling. She is grateful for her life and wants to help families, and give back to foster children and the community. Although she says she is not a religious person per se, she acknowledged, "Right at this very moment, I think God was with me every step of the way."

When I initially asked Warrior how she perceived herself, given all that she has experienced and her background, she immediately stood up and said emphatically "I'm a Warrior! I will fight anybody who tries to hurt my family and go to war for them,

anytime, anyway, anywhere. Yes I am a Warrior, that fits me." And that is how Warrior chose her pseudonym.

Protector

Personal Background

Protector and I met twice on two different Sundays in the evenings at a private location in the East Bay. She is a 34-year-old African American woman, but thinks there is Native American ancestry on her mother's side of the family and "perhaps Creole or Portuguese or Hispanic" on her father's side. She frankly admitted that her father never knew his father and "to be perfectly honest, I just tend to say I'm African American because that's what I look like, so that's what I roll with." She has been married to her husband, a former military man, for 12 years and they have two children, a son and daughter. Protector was born and raised in Berkeley, California, and has five siblings. She has worked for Alameda County intermittently since 1997, but has been employed full time for 5 years.

Protector said she loves to laugh and admitted that the older she gets, she is finding that she is more of a homebody, and likes to have social gatherings at her home. She is beginning to feel more connected to her siblings than she did previously and "likes to hang out with her family, her husband and kids and their friends." Protector was very reflective and open about her experiences in foster care, and though she and Warrior are sisters, their perspectives and experiences differ in significant ways.

Life Before Foster/Kinship Care

Protector recalled that she and her siblings moved in with her grandmother after her father left them when she was 8 years old. She described how the police raided their

house and busted through the door without warning one morning. Protector said that she had a bad feeling that day. “Something just didn’t seem right to me, and I told my sister, ‘let’s take the kids and go to the park’ but she didn’t want to go.” The feeling was so strong that she was not surprised when the police busted into the house, but they were so afraid that she and her sister

> grabbed up the kids and ran to the phone booth on the corner and called my godmother Terri. Her husband answered the phone and came and got us, but we couldn’t stay because he knew that he did not have legal custody of us, so brought us back to the house. CPS took us all and split us up.

She said there were so many of them in that one house that I “didn’t have enough tape on your machine to get through all that happened in that house.”

She described her family home as “there were 23 of us living in a two bedroom duplex apartment in Berkeley” but after the police raided the apartment, all the children were separated and sent to live with different people. She and her siblings were in foster care for about a month before being returned to her grandmother’s care and custody. Neither Protector nor I could understand how they were placed back with her grandmother even though her mother still lived in the same home. They remained with their grandmother and mother for about a year until they were removed again and placed in foster care.

Life in Kinship/Foster Care

Protector vividly remembered feeling “numb” and on “auto pilot” after she and her siblings were initially removed and placed in the foster home. She and her sister were placed together, and recalled that the foster parent separated them in her home. There were two other girls who lived in the home prior to them being placed there and she grimaced as she remembered that she was forced to sleep in the same bed with the one

who "peed the bed." She recalled the experience was strange and felt uncomfortable the entire time she was there.

A few weeks later they were court ordered back to their grandmother's house and remained with her and their mother until their grandmother moved a couple blocks away and gave up custody of them. Although she was not really clear how, or why, somehow they were placed in the home of their aunt and uncle. I asked if the court was involved and she wryly said, "I'm assuming she did go through the court, 'cause she sure didn't do it for free." Her aunt received payment from the county as a "kinship placement."

Protector was eventually removed from her aunt and uncle's care and placed in a different foster home on Skyline after about a year or so. She vividly recalled that the foster parent never provided her with lunch money, clothing, or an allowance even though the payment she received from the county included money for clothing and an allowance.

> I survived every day off of Dr. Pepper and cheese fries that my friend bought me, or if my sister gave me money. My sister used to buy me clothes for school, or we traded clothes since we were the same size.

She had nothing positive to say about her experience in that foster home. "People thought because I lived on Skyline that I had money, and I was as poor as they come. She gave me nothing." The living situation was strained, challenging, and difficult for her. She got through by telling herself that she had to do what she needed to do to get through.

Protector remembered that she had two social workers who she rarely saw. One of the workers was from Alameda County and the other was from Napenthenon, an FFA that contracted with Alameda County. She summed them up thusly: "I just know I had two social workers and one of them was stupid and the one just didn't care. Both of them were White." She clearly remembered that one of the social workers from Alameda

County “was a drunk, an alcoholic. Me and my sister would see her and say, ‘she’s either high or drunk’ and she didn’t care that we knew.” She recollected that the social worker believed everything her aunt told to her, and never bothered to check with them about anything. She said she focused on getting through each day because the kids in the foster parent’s home were challenging and had mental health issues that had not been addressed.

The foster parent had her own issues as well, so it was a matter of survival and doing whatever was necessary to get through it. Part of getting through it was pretending that she wanted to be part of the foster parent’s family by calling her “mom’” because it made things go smoother for her. She did not talk to her sister about the problems she encountered because “she couldn’t fix it and that would probably have driven her nuts so I would tell her stuff here and there, not everything.”

There were times when the foster mother would not allow her to visit her grandmother as a form of punishment, or if she got angry with her. Her grandmother had a specific time to call, and if she did not call at that certain time, the foster parent told her she could not go and see her on the weekends. So the following Monday, Protector would skip school and go spend time with her mother and grandmother. She admitted that she became rebellious at that point because she received virtually nothing from the foster parent other than a place to sleep and food. Her recollection was that she had nowhere or no one to turn to. She wanted her mother “to get it together” and was frustrated that it was taking so long for her to get them out of foster care. She ultimately became resigned to being in foster care, “but it never got better.” She simply dealt with it until her sister petitioned the court to allow her to move into an apartment with her.

Protector revealed that

> being in foster care was really, really interesting. I lived in such a nice neighborhood, a nice area, and going to school at Skyline, I'd get off that bus and everyone assumed that I had money and I was poor as hell. Super poor. And I had a friend who I met in the 10th grade and we were friends for about 6 years and that was probably the most memorable part 'cause its like he knew and never judged me, Ever. About anything I went through, even when things got chaotic, he would always be there and I could call him. … He was always there.

Emancipation From Foster Care

After emancipating out of foster care, Protector and Warrior lived together for about a year before she participated in the ILSP and enrolled in Alameda College for about a semester. The ILSP program did not offer financial assistance for college tuition. Even though she received a waiver, she said she had to "decide between attending class and eating, and I chose to eat." She worked the night shift at Just Desserts, and added more hours to support herself, so going to college at that time was "put on the backburner." She did not have a car so the hours and sacrifices she had to make to attend college were not beneficial to her at that time. Protector worked for Just Desserts for about a year, then she was hired for a temporary position for Alameda County and moved out on her own.

Adulthood and Life Satisfaction

Protector recalled that as an adult she came to terms with her relationship with her mother and "at times, I really resented her, especially when times were tough with my foster parent." She said, upon reflection, that she realized that she had given up on her mother before she went to live with her last foster parent, but over time saw that she really was making an effort to get free of drugs and remain that way.

> It took her awhile though, and I could see she was really trying and trying to do what the courts were telling her what to do to get the kids back. My sister didn't come back to live with her until she was 12 because my relatives fought to keep

> her and the social workers didn't help my mother at all. The social worker was like 'whatever. Whatever you want to do is fine with me.

So that's why it took a long time for my mom to get all her kids back. My brother still has problems because of his experiences in foster care and living with my aunt."

Protector admitted that when she was 20 years old, she spent her time at parties and clubs, but quickly got tired of it by the time she was 21 years old. She met her husband a couple of months after turning 21 and stopped going out permanently after they got serious. She said he was the first person who liked the same things she did and he proposed to her when he was deployed to Germany. She and her husband went through difficult times but worked through it. "We kind of grew up together. We were so young and we didn't understand what we were actually doing and we didn't communicate. We learned though."

At this time in her life, Protector has returned to school, and plans to advance in her career. She feels that it is important to give back and plans to mentor children because she had a person who maintained a close relationship with her and her siblings through their troubles, and they remain close today.

The following section will discuss the three major research questions and the generative themes that emerged from the coding and data analysis of the transcribed dialogue between the participants and researcher. Table 3 shows the themes that emerged from the dialogues.

Table 3

Questions and Themes that Guided the Dialogues

Questions	Themes
Question # 1 What factors influenced the motivation, perseverance and development of life-sustaining skills as a former foster youth?	Positive relationship with parent or trusted adult Family Responsibility
Question # 2 What personal and interpersonal influences contributed to subjective well-being after emancipation from foster care and into adulthood?	Adapting to circumstances Independence, self-reliance and perseverance
Question #3 What factors contributed to achievements, accomplishment of goals and life satisfaction?	Self-Determination and perception of self as survivor

Generative Themes

This section will discuss the three research questions and the generative themes that emerged from each of the five sections of the research questions. The five subsections discussed the participants' home life before entry into foster/kinship care, participants' experiences in kinship/foster care, experiences after emancipation, adulthood, and perceptions of self as former foster youths.

Research Question 1: What factors influenced the motivation, perseverance, and development of life-sustaining skills as a former foster youth? Two generative themes emerged from the dialogues: *Positive relationship with parent/trusted adult* and *Family responsibility.*

Home Life Before Foster Care/Kinship Care

Positive Relationship With Parent or Trusted Adult

Survivor, Nurturer, Warrior, and Protector all said they had a good relationship with their mothers before placement in foster care. Warrior and Protector have had a long-term relationship with a trusted adult who has supported them since they were 8 and 10 years old. In describing her relationship with her mother, Survivor said she was the

second oldest girl in her family and her mother depended on her to take care of her brothers and sisters as well as help out with chores. She always felt proud that her mother depended on her. She had only fond memories of her relationship with her mother:

> I had a warm loving relationship with my mother, and she taught me to be self-sufficient and to do things for myself. My mom was my hero. My mother never complained. She did what she had to do to survive and feed me and my brothers and sisters. Somehow in the first ten years of my life she embedded in me a lot of things. And only God knew she had a short time in which to do them but she did.

After her mother died, Survivor recalled that her aunt was a person she trusted and with whom she had a relationship, although her aunt was only 2 years older than her.

> After my mother died, I mean, one of my aunts that's oh, she was 2 years older than me, and she was the one that … okay, because her mother, my grandmother also died when she was young and we used to sort of like help each other out. So she used to babysit. She worked as a—what do you call it—a live-in nanny? A housekeeper stuff? And so what money she made—she bought herself a skirt, she'd buy me a skirt. She bought herself a sweater, she'd buy me a sweater. She went to get a hamburger—one hamburger for you, one hamburger for me. Let's go to the movies—okay we go to the movies. But those were not like weekly occurrences because I mean, she had money—her money—but that was her money, not my money. But she was willing to share. She was the only one. And the only reason, I guess, she did what she did because we found ourselves, like. Here we are, two orphans lost in the sea of …. alone, because there's nobody else. She had other sisters. She had two sisters. She had two brothers but there was nobody there that was interested in parenting us.

Nurturer said that she had a good relationship with her mother when they lived in Richmond, Virginia. She talked about life with her mother before drugs took control of her life and before her siblings were born:

> I was with my mother for like 6 years by myself before any of the other kids came along, and things were good, you know. I had good memories of being with my mom. We were doing well, she was working and had friends. We lived in an apartment that was nice and I saw the best part of my mother more than my little sisters did. I have good memories that are really grounded in me and are rooted in me, and those memories are not fantasies, like for real positive memories. My mother instilled in me the desire to succeed early on. She challenged me to do my best in everything and I felt safe and secure.

Warrior made no secret of the fact that even though her mother was on drugs, she loved her, willingly assumed responsibility for her siblings, and intimated that it was expected of her. She said that no matter what, her mother was the most important person in her life, but she also had her godmother to lean on when the situation became difficult:

> I could lean on my godmother to get what I needed. So my family kept me strong and grounded. I'm sorry I didn't do more for them. I felt like it was my job even though it wasn't, but I felt like I should have done more.

Protector also recalled that her godmother was very important in her life and stated,

> But we had people our life who actually … like my godmother Terri. Terri was like … I felt like if I didn't graduate from high school I was letting her down. We had just enough people in our life that made us feel like we had a purpose. And I never felt like my mother didn't love me. I've always had relationships with older people around me that were positive. So if I didn't have Terri, my mom's sister, who wanted me to live with her—we've always been really, really close. Even though it wasn't my parents, I've always had positive adults in my life to kind of steer us. I felt like I owed Terri. We would go over to her house for math night every Wednesday and she invested so much in us to where I felt like you don't deserve that disappointment.

Warrior recalled that she and her siblings grew up in a house where drugs were "sold and used" and "my grandmother was the drug dealer." She said she lived with her "grandmother, my mother and my six siblings, and other people until there were about 24 people in a two bedroom apartment. It was crowded but I took care of my siblings because my mother was on drugs real bad."

Neither Buddha Nature nor Resilient Overcomer were raised by foster parents who were licensed by the social-service agency, but both had positive relationships with caring adults in the community. Buddha Nature recalled the love and acceptance she received from the women in the neighborhood when she was a child:

> The neighborhood folks just took kids in. … A lot of my friends might have come from single family homes, or had lost a parent, or their grandmom was raising

> them, and it just wasn't a big deal. My foster mom's mother took care of me in the family home. I was very close to her and she was living there, you know, and taught me how to make doll clothes, we used to crochet little scarves and she gave me a lot of one-on-one. I received love and attention from my foster mom's side of the family and lots of encouragement from the neighborhood ladies.

Resilient Overcomer recalled growing up as the only child with her foster mother and father but felt supported by the women in the neighborhood:

> Like I said, I can't even remember all their names, but there were several women in my life, all along my life that have mentored me in some way or taken an interest in me. And I think its been important to me recognizing or seeing that there's greater things out there. Like my godmother was very influential woman in my life. She was really pro-woman, pro Black, all of that.

Family Responsibility

Survivor, Nurturer, and Warrior all were responsible for their siblings or relative's children even as children themselves. Although Warrior and Nurturer assumed adult responsibility for their siblings, Survivor was expected to take care of her aunt's child in exchange for room and board after her mother's death. She stated:

> I became a parent when my mom died and I didn't do a very good job and then I thought "well [Survivor], what can you expect from a 10-year-old girl?' But of course at the time, I thought I was a big girl trying to do what my mother used to do. … I was close to my siblings and often had to take care of them when my mother worked. I learned how to make tortillas from watching my mother, I learned how to do the laundry and make the starch and use the washing board, because I wanted to help my mother out. I learned from her.

Nurturer assumed responsibility for her siblings and her mother's friend's child.

> You know I've always been a caretaker. When I was a kid, I was doing adult kind of things just because of the circumstances in my family required me to be that way, a nurturer and caretaker. I was very parentified, you know, and ended up escaping by going to school. I took care of my little sisters. My baby sister, I'm really close to her, because my mother never bonded with her. She called me mama. I was there for all the important developmental stages and we're still close today. My middle sister had it hard, and she blames me for us going into foster care, but I had to do what I did so my family could get some help.

Warrior explained her perspective on being responsible:

> I have to put my family first. I've always taken care of my siblings. I just felt bad that I didn't do more for them. I felt like it was my job even though it wasn't, but I felt like I should have done more.

Research Question 2: What personal and interpersonal influences contributed to subjective well-being after emancipating from foster care? The generative themes that emerged from the question were *Adapting to circumstances* and *Independence, self-reliance, and perseverance.*

Foster/Kinship Care Experiences/Emancipation

Adapting to Circumstances

After being removed from their families, Survivor, Warrior, Protector, and Nurturer described the traumatic impact of the removals. For example, Survivor recalled being made to

> feel unwanted, as if I were an intruder, and "a live-in maid. I missed my mother so much, but I couldn't show them, I couldn't cry. So I did what they wanted, because you see, I was trying to win hearts and get food in my tummy. It's a wonder I didn't get depressed!

All participants remembered having to adapt to each situation in which they found themselves, whether in kinship care or foster care. Each remembered that they had to adjust their behavior, and were hypervigilant so as not to bring attention to themselves or bring on the wrath of the foster parent, kinfolk, the other children in the home, or the social worker.

Nurturer recalled

> I felt extremely guilty and sad for all of us. I tried to help myself and my little sisters, and the only way was to tell someone. My mother was angry at me and my middle sister still blames me for her going into foster care. Things were horrible.

Nurturer recalled that she got involved in every activity she could in high school, partially because

> I overcompensated so I didn't have to think about my sisters, the situation, and my mom. I maintained a positive, cheerful persona, but I recognized as I matured that I wasn't alright. I distanced myself from my feelings but remember feeling sad about my sister and not having contact and knowing where they were at times.

She got involved in every activity available at school but also worked at McDonalds to pay for her membership to the various clubs and activities in which she was involved.

Protector said she had to "play that game with my foster mom" just so she would be allowed to see her mother and siblings. When she did something her foster mother did not like, she forbid her from going to see her mother and grandmother to punish her. She rebelled by disregarding school for the day and went to see them anyway. The conditions in the foster home were chaotic because two of the foster children there had mental health problems "and no one seemed to notice." She stayed away as much as possible until she went to live with her sister. Protector also admitted that she used "sarcasm and jokes" to deal with the stressful situation with her kin and foster parent.

Buddha Nature stated,

> I stayed in my room and read books. I loved to read and I was shy so I didn't have many friends … and my foster mom wasn't easy to be around. Or I went to visit the neighborhood ladies cause they talked to me and I liked being with them. I always had my head buried in a book.

Warrior admitted that her aunt favored her, but she felt guilty because though she did not overtly mistreat her siblings, she was aware that she "could be mean at times when I wasn't around." She tried to intercede on their behalf whenever possible, but felt guilty and responsible because she couldn't protect them full time.

Independence, Self-Reliance, and Perseverance

Survivor, Warrior, and Protector were placed in the homes of relatives and all described the experience as "the worst thing that ever happened" to them.

Survivor stated that as difficult as the circumstances were at her aunt's house, thoughts of her mother's love sustained her:

> I held on to thoughts of my mother's love when things got really bad. When I wanted to run away, I thought about the "outside world" and I wasn't willing to take the risk for the unknown when I knew what I was dealing with. But you know … just making it day to day and I'm surprised I didn't get depressed.

Warrior and Protector supported each other while in the care of their aunt.

> My aunt wouldn't let my mother come over to her house. But they had their own issues and were getting about $2,000 for all of us and we were staying in a two-bedroom roach infested apartment and they weren't paying rent so you tell me where the money went. Cause we didn't get much, but hey.

She recalled that her main objective was to get her siblings out of foster care but had no help from social workers, "I knew I had to get out of my aunt's house and out of foster care. I wanted my brothers and sisters out and I couldn't get help from those social workers." Warrior and Protector were eventually removed from their aunt's home and placed in foster care. Despite being separated and placed in different foster homes they maintained constant contact. Warrior stated that she got a job

> because I knew I had to make money. I had to take care of my siblings. And I was going to show them. I was determined to show them, so I focused on my family more than I focused on myself.

Buddha Nature described her living situation with her foster parents as very restrictive, but said "in the back of my mind I had always planned to leave."

> I decided to leave right before I graduated from high school because I got home late one night (according to my foster dad)) and he whooped me and said I must be out doing something. I had been saving my little money anyway and that did it for me. I had met a girl at school and we got along and so I packed my stuff and left and never went back to that house.

After she enrolled in college, she admitted,

> initially, I didn't apply myself, and I saw that my girlfriends were talking about getting married, and marriage? I wasn't interested. So while I'm in college, my foster mom's father, who lived in Jackson, Mississippi sent me a $100. I knew

> that he'd been saving for a long time, and that was a lot of money for that time. I never expected he would do that, and it came in handy and I really appreciated it, so I knew I had to get serious … and I didn't want to disappoint him or myself, so I began to apply myself and got serious about what I wanted to do, so I changed schools and got serious about becoming a nurse.

Nurturer lost contact with her sisters and mother after she went into foster care. She had minimal contact with social workers but remembered that she "bugged one of them so much that she arranged for me to go and see my baby sister." The foster parents were not cooperative and did not answer the door when she arrived at their home. She said "that was a sad time because I didn't see my sisters until they were adults." She recalled that it was common practice for social workers not to arrange for visits with parents or siblings:

> Oh no, in the 80s?? Umm uh. I remember when we went to court my mother came and the judge really was talking, you know, telling her how horrible she was—-this was the beginning of the crack epidemic, right—and my mother was like, "you know, these White people ain't going to talk to me like that. The hell with you all! And she left but she said to me, "you know I can't allow people to talk to me like that. You know I'm in a bad situation but he don't have no right to talk to me like that blah blah blah." In the 80s, it wasn't about visitation or anything like that, it was about you're a bad parent and you shouldn't be able to have your kids because you're a crackhead.

Nurturer worked constantly while in foster care and the entire 4 years she was a student at the University of California-Santa Barbara:

> I always *worked*. I've always been a hustler, cause you never know. I was constantly on the grind. I was worried about where I was going to live when the dorms closed during the holidays and summer. So I always had a place to stay because I worked throughout high school, undergrad and graduate school. I was determined that I *was not going to be a statistic!"*

After the six participants were told to leave, left, or emancipated from their respective placements, they were employed and were self-supporting. They all stated that they did not try or want to return to their respective homes and did not ask their biological family or foster families for assistance. Survivor worked in a pants factory

after graduating from high school, but eventually met and married her husband. Buddha Nature completed the LVN program and worked as an LVN for 5 years before returning to school to pursue her degree in nursing. Nurturer earned her bachelor's degree from University of California-Santa Barbara and applied to the master's in social welfare program at San Francisco State University. Resilient Overcomer did not immediately enroll in college after high school, but lived with her boyfriend until she decided to apply at California State University-East Bay and was admitted 3 years later. Warrior emancipated from foster care and petitioned the court to allow her sister to be released to her care and custody. They shared an apartment for a year and both had jobs. They wanted to go to college but had to work to maintain their finances.

Research Question 3: What factors contributed to achievements, accomplishment of goals, and life satisfaction? The generative themes that emerged were *Self-determination* and *Perception of oneself as a survivor*.

Self-Determination and Perception of Oneself as a Survivor

All participants felt education was key to getting themselves out of their situations. However, Warrior and Protector made it clear that they did not care for school and the only reason they graduated and stayed was because of their godmother, Terri. Terri impressed on them the importance of education throughout their formative years into adulthood. Protector stated, "I didn't want to disappoint Terri, and that is the only reason I graduated and stayed in school." After she graduated, she attended college for a semester, but was self-supporting and worked in a bakery. Protector had to pick up extra shifts to pay her bills. She stated, "It was eating or school. School took a backburner."

Warrior stated that she never liked school but graduated because "I didn't want to disappoint Terri. She stayed with us, made sure we did our homework, and she wanted us to do well in school." Warrior said that although she realized the value of an education, after she emancipated from foster care, she was focused on earning a living and maintaining her housing. However, after she gave birth to her son, she decided to return to school and enrolled in the Phoenix program. Right from the beginning she told her counselor that she needed her "hand held" throughout the process,

> because I knew if she didn't, I would quit. And she was right there throughout the entire process, and I appreciate that. When I wanted to quit and say forget it, she stuck with me and encouraged me, and now I'm proud of myself that I didn't give up.

Buddha Nature recalled that her foster father told her, "I needed an education to learn a skill so that I could take care of myself." Her foster mother encouraged her to get her education "because she had no formal education herself and seemed resentful that she was dependent on my foster dad." She told Buddha Nature,

> You know, you're a Black woman and its important that you be independent. I married young, and didn't have a formal education. If you become independent, the men you meet will have to treat you differently because you don't have to take no B.S.

She credits her foster mother with encouraging her to go into nursing. "You know, somebody's always going to be sick or be having a baby so you'll never have to worry about having a job." Buddha Nature said she did not want to teach, but had always had a soft heart when it came to taking care of people and animals.

> And besides, I was never going to marry anybody's boss. But you know, there were some wonderful Black women that made me realize that I had something to offer and nursing was the key to me getting to where I am now. I have had opportunities and people that helped me out, and even though I was mad at times, I kept it inside because I knew I would be leaving my foster parent's home. And I realize now that they had it rough too. So I don't blame them, because they had their own problems with their own parents. So I knew I would be able to support

> myself as long as I got my BSN. I wasn't going to work as an LVN all my life because I knew I could do better.

Nurturer applied to San Francisco State University after graduating from University of California-Santa Barbara. Her initial goal for applying for the county position was because

> I wanted a job where I couldn't get fired, it had benefits, and I planned to stay there for stability. And I planned not to have babies because I didn't want to become a statistic! I wasn't going down that road, that was not God's plan for me, so I have walked the straight and narrow. I am not spontaneous, and sometimes that's not good, but I have plans for my life and I didn't end up like my sisters. My sisters ended up being statistics. So I am here by God's grace and because there were people that took me under their wings, prayed for me and I guess I was blessed to be in the right place at the right time.

Resilient Overcomer remembered being told by her "mom" the importance of education for as long as she could remember. She recalled,

> it was always drilled in me the importance of education, and to be self-sufficient and independent. I got that early on that education was my ticket to achievement. I was raised in a good environment, in the church and she had me in programs.

Resilient Overcomer said she always planned to go to college, that it was '"innate' in me."

Each of the six participants shared that their goal was to get out of foster care and live on their own, on their own terms. Survivor, Buddha Nature, Nurturer, and Resilient Overcomer related that they always had a goal in mind to have a better life than their foster parent and relatives. Although Resilient Overcomer "took a break," from school after she graduated, she ultimately returned after "having an epiphany." She said,

> I realized that I wasn't on my path that I needed to be on. I never wanted to get pregnant and have babies without being married, and as far as CPS, I thought they were baby snatchers and they left a bad taste in my mouth. So I didn't want to be involved in no way with CPS! I learned after I went to UC Berkeley that I could do some good for girls that got in trouble, but for me, I didn't want none of that. So I got it in my mind that I was going to be a social worker and work with the girls and get involved in the community and give back.

Although Nurturer said she has a very close and personal relationship with God, Protector was not so sure

> because we weren't really raised religious, so we only went to church on like the holidays. So really … I think … and I tend to have disagreements with the religious people that I know because I feel that as long as you are a good person and you try to do right, you should go to Heaven. Period.

As the discussion deepened, I asked her if she had a belief in a higher being that helped her overcome the challenges of being in foster care? "Do I believe in God? No." I asked who she felt helped her when she was in situations that were not safe?

> Somebody … and I think in hindsight, I believe that someone was watching over me. I had a great support system. And maybe that is, in a way, me being looked out by a higher power. Yeah. Some of the stuff I went through, you can't make this stuff up. I'm just thankful that Terri never gave up on us. She was always a phone call away. The stuff Warrior and I went through has made us closer, we're really, really close to each other. My sister has a genuinely beautiful heart and has strength beyond belief. She is willing to help anybody … everybody. So the things we talked about made me think about what we went through in a different way. It was easier talking to you because of your position and you've seen things. So thank you.

The participants stated at some point during the dialogues that they had a firm belief in a higher power that helped them through the challenges and difficulties associated with their foster-care experiences. However, they reported that their perspectives have changed and all of them see themselves in a positive light as survivors of foster care.

Summary of Major Findings

In Chapter 4, I described interviews and documented five African American women and one Hispanic woman who were formerly in foster care as youths. All the women were employees at a social-services agency in Alameda County. Two of the women were child-welfare workers who hold master's degrees in social welfare. Of the two, one is division director of the agency and the other is a supervisor. Two participants

are registered nurses with a specialization in public health. The remaining two participants are siblings. One works in the LiveScan department and the other works in the eligibility department. All experienced significant challenges in foster or kinship care, which ultimately influenced their motivation, perseverance, and determination to achieve, despite adversities, and accomplish their goals.

The participants shared the challenges they experienced in foster/kinship care after removal from their family's homes. Generative themes emerged based on the three major research questions (see Appendix E). Factors influencing the participants' motivation and perseverance despite the challenges of foster care were that four of the six participants' had positive relationships with their mother(s) and family responsibilities prior to coming into foster care. Their relationship with their mother(s) allowed them to develop life-sustaining skills that enabled them to adapt to the change in circumstances once they were removed from their family homes. The two participants who were "given over" to unrelated caregivers or foster parents received love and support from the older women in their neighborhoods. The older women provided guidance and advice as they taught them how to bake, crochet, and cook. Three of the participants who were initially placed with relatives experienced many challenges, but were able to adapt to the circumstances in the home(s) and ultimately emancipated into emerging adulthood. The six participants emancipated from foster care and relied on themselves, continuing to establish their careers and accomplishing their educational and personal goals. They entered adulthood employed, with self-confidence born of determination, and a sense that they were survivors of foster care, not its victims.

The participants were very interested and willing to be involved in the research. During the interview I allowed participants to narrate their personal and professional experiences, which included their background, life before entry into foster care, life while in foster care, and after emancipation. The memories and reflections were illuminating, heartbreaking, enriching, enlightening, and sometimes funny. Most of all, the reflections were a validation of who they were, the strengths most did not know they possessed, and challenges they overcame to become the caring people they are.

Some of the participants' recall of the more painful memories evoked tears. The participants later shared that the tears "needed to be let out. I feel like something is lifted from me." The participants and I grew close as the dialogues deepened and the participants shared traumatic memories that had lain dormant for so long. I was always in communication with the participants and was available to them.

The narrative, qualitative research also allowed participants to share their personal feelings of excitement and gratitude for being asked to participate in the study. They expressed to me in person: "Nobody in social services ever cared about what happened to me and my sister when we were in foster care. I am so happy to be a part of this you just don't know!" Another shared that

> talking about that time in my life, I never thought about it until we discussed it and I see now that I did come a long way. Nobody ever asked me how I felt about what I went through and now that we talked about it, it blows my mind how I got through it. I thank you so much for asking me to be a part of your study.

The following chapter, Chapter 5, discusses and summarizes this dissertation as well as providing recommendations for future research and for professional practices. I also offer my personal reflections.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The final chapter of this dissertation is comprised of three sections in which the research results will be discussed. The first section will discuss the major findings and provide conclusions for the findings. The second section will discuss recommendations for further research and recommendations for professional practices. The third section will conclude with reflections and closing remarks.

Discussion and Conclusion

Three major questions guided this study. In this section, each research question will be discussed and followed with a conclusion.

Discussion and Conclusion for Research Question 1

Research Question 1: What factors influenced the motivation, perseverance, and development life-sustaining skills as a former foster youth?

The participants reflected on the challenges and experiences they endured while in foster/kinship care. Two areas were identified as factors that influenced the motivation and perseverance to develop skills that remained with them throughout their years in foster/relative care. The two themes identified were positive relationship with parent or trusted adult, and family responsibility.

Positive Relationship With Parent or Trusted Adult

The first major theme that emerged from four participants' dialogues was their love for their mother(s). Throughout the dialogues, without fail, three participants spoke lovingly of their mother(s) and the sense of safety, despite often chaotic and unsafe

conditions in the home. These participants were always aware of their mother's whereabouts and had access to her when they needed her. Three of the participants' mother(s) had substance-abuse problems. While they knew about the substance abuse, they accepted their mother's addiction and were very protective of her. After they were removed from their mother(s) Protector and Warrior expressed resentment because they wanted her to "get it together" and get them out of foster care. They maintained contact with her the entire time they were in kinship/foster care.

The finding that emerged from the first question was intriguing as there is little research on children's relationships with their parents/caretaker prior to removal. Even though the oldest of the participants was 68, she credited her mother's love for her as a factor for why she was able to persevere despite incredible challenges.

Two participants who were "given over" to strangers received warm support and guidance from Black women in their neighborhoods. Historically, African American communities have banded together to nurture and support children whose parents were not available. According to Stack (1974), even when there is no blood relationship between kin and "fictive" kin, African American communities traditionally were such that neighbors cared for one another's children. When needed, temporary arrangements often can turn into long-term care or informal adoption. Neither Buddha Nature nor Resilient Overcomer were formally adopted by their foster parents, but they were raised as if they were adopted by their foster parents. Although both perceived their caretakers as "foster parents" or in Resilient Overcomer's case, "my mom that raised me," both indicated that they were lucky to have been raised by them despite the challenges. Buddha Nature thoughtfully commented "it really does take a village to raise a child."

There is no current research that concurs with the findings in this study. Research on former foster youth's positive relationship with their parent is an understudied phenomenon.

Family Responsibility

Historically, African American families have depended on the older child to provide care for their younger siblings, because many parents had to work and could not afford childcare. Assuming responsibility for their youngest siblings rested squarely on the shoulders of the oldest child and has been part of African American and Hispanic history for decades (Nadasen, 2007). The expectation and cultural values of African American and Hispanic families is that the older child will take care of and is responsible for their younger siblings. It is understood by family members that they will conform to the family's unwritten rules. Children are respectful of their parents and assume responsibility for their siblings without complaint. The older child conforms to the expectation of their parents and perceives that it is expected that they do so (Nadasen, 2007)).

Three of the participants perceived that taking care of their younger siblings helped their mother out, and that it was expected of them. After being placed in foster care or with relatives, two participants continued to be responsible for their siblings. The sense of responsibility was so engrained in Survivor that she remembered how she tried to take her mother's place after she died. She realized she could not, for she was only 10 years old at the time. When discussing that event, she revealed that she still felt such a strong sense of responsibility because she could not prevent her siblings from being adopted. She continued to be responsible for her younger brother in the home of her aunt

until he, too, was put up for adoption. All of the participants took on adult roles at very young ages. Despite turbulence in the homes, and transitioning from their family's home to foster/kinship care, all the participants continued to persevere.

The findings from this research revealed that participants were well functioning despite removal from their parent, loss of a parent, poverty, and parental substance abuse. There is little research on youth who have exited the foster-care system. Much of the research that exists identified primarily poor outcomes for former foster youth. The six participants in the study did not succumb to the disruptions in their environment/home life. To the contrary, each of them were motivated to develop skills that enabled them to adapt and function well academically, socially, and psychologically.

There is also a lack of research on older adults who have grown up in the foster care system and emancipated. Youths raised in foster care face problems that become more severe. Foster youth who do not have protective factors experience poorer outcomes. Participants in this study experienced many challenging stressors but did not succumb to the conditions in the environment, perhaps because they had protective factors that enabled them to persevere despite the challenges. Most had to grow up quickly and assume parenting responsibilities for younger siblings, in addition to running the household.

The theoretical framework for the study was CRT. Throughout their narratives, matters of the race of the social worker and racist acts factored into situations that affected the parents directly and participants indirectly. For example, the social worker abruptly moved Nurturer to another foster home after she learned that the foster parent allowed her to see her mother. The social worker did not allow Nurturer to contact her

mother "until she contacts me first." She indicated that she thought the foster parent could not control Nurturer and punished her by moving her to another foster home. CRT posits that the social sciences perceive "others" as deviant from the "norm," which is defined as White, heterosexual, bourgeois, and male (Foucault, 2001).

Warrior and Protector's mother received little assistance from her social worker as well. However, in acts of resistance, they disregarded class if their foster parent did not allow them to see their mother or grandmother. Their mother was subjected to disparate and racist treatment by the court and child welfare. It was only after she was assigned an African American social worker that she was able to progress and have her children returned to her care. However, their sibling had been placed in foster care when she was less than 2 years old. She wasn't returned until she was 12 years old.

Two participants recalled the judges' disrespect and disregard for their mother as they ruled against their siblings return to her. Parental rights were terminated without regard for the progress many mothers made in an effort to reunify with their children. Participants who were court dependents did not reunify with their parents and emancipated out of foster care. The social worker made no effort to provide resources to their parents. Racism was evident at every decision point.

Although all six participants recollected that they felt comfortable in their own community, it was not until they were placed in foster care and had contact with White social workers that their perspectives changed. All were from impoverished communities and only left their neighborhood when they were bussed to school. The stigma related to being in foster care resulted in a lack of connection with their peers and that knowledge set them apart from other children. Furthermore, two had been warned by their mother

and grandmother not to disclose what was going on in the home, so the level of secrecy was heightened even as events in their lives spiraled out of control.

Studies that focused on former foster youth's family responsibility and the importance of maintaining family relationships have not been researched. The impact on youth who have lost contact with parents and siblings has received scant attention but is an important issue in child welfare.

Discussion and Conclusions for Research Question 2

Research Question 2: What personal and interpersonal influences contributed to subjective well-being after emancipation from foster care into adulthood? Through dialogue between participants and me, I identified two themes that contributed to subjective well-being after emancipation from foster care: adapting to circumstances; and independence, self-reliance, and perseverance.

Adapting to Circumstances

Studies on the psychological impact of removal from one's parents and familiar surroundings concluded foster youth often show symptoms suggestive of PTSD. After CPS intervened and removed Nurturer, Warrior, and Protector from their families, their comments ranged from "feeling numb," to "confused," and "I was on auto pilot and just rolled with it." All commented that the social workers said nothing to allay their fears, and offered little information about where they were going to go or whether they would see their mother again. Prior to 1980, the child-welfare system removed Black children with impunity and did not address their emotional or mental health needs. The six participants adapted to their individual situations and functioned well after adjusting to being in foster/kinship care.

Resilient individuals achieve adaptive functioning in the face of adversity. Despite the disruption in their lives, the participants continued to perform well academically, participated in extracurricular activities, showed resourcefulness, and found ways to get their needs met by teachers or caring adults. The six participants were exposed to severe adversity and significant threats to their safety and well-being, but they survived despite disparate treatment from relatives and foster parents. Studies on resiliency indicate factors related to foster-care experiences include loss of or removal from parents, multiple transitions, and the stigma of foster care (Cicchetti et al., 1993). Despite the lack of support from social workers and the child-welfare agency overall, all six participants adapted to being in foster/kinship care, but as they reached adolescence began to set goals for themselves and made plans to leave foster/kinship care as soon as possible.

Each participant discovered adaptive mechanisms in themselves and began to plan for their future. They spoke of the loss of connection with their siblings and mother, thus involvement with school activities became a refuge. They became adept at hiding their emotions from kin and foster parents, but had adults in their lives who continued to provide emotional support. Few studies ask foster youth to describe their own experiences in out-of-home care and there is a gap in the literature. Research suggests that children in foster care have negative experiences. However, a study found that the majority of youth had positive appraisals of out-of-home care (Courtney et al., 2001). The participants in the current study did not have positive experiences in foster or kinship care and did not concur with research on youth's appraisals of their foster-care experiences.

Independence, Self-Reliance, and Perseverance

All participants left their respective foster placements with well thought-out plans, money saved from working while in high school, and plans to continue their education and become self-supporting. Participants reflected that they knew they needed to graduate so that they could advance in life. Survivor and Buddha Nature, the older of the six participants, had aspirations to become nurses and took the necessary steps to achieve their goals. According to research on former foster youth, educational attainment is lower for former foster youths than for other economically disadvantaged students (Kirk, Lewis, Nilsen, & Colvin, 2011). There is little evidence available that explains which factors contribute to positive outcomes for former foster youth. From the perspective of the two older participants, they recognized very early that education "was the key to a better life." Black women in her childhood neighborhood had stressed the importance of education to Buddha Nature. Survivor prepared herself for a better job by taking classes she felt would provide her with an administrative position. However, both experienced overt racist attitudes, but each was determined not to allow discrimination or racism to deter them from their main objective. Buddha Nature was given implicit messages from the trainers in her LVN class that she was not smart enough to pursue a registered nursing degree. Survivor was given implicit messages that she was only suited for retail by her high school counselors. Both acknowledged the veiled racism behind the messages, but continued to pursue their educational goals.

The participants found jobs and worked, saved their money and ultimately left their respective foster homes. They relied on themselves and did not return to their foster homes or ask for assistance. Research on foster youth who emancipate show that many

experience poor outcomes and often end up homeless or “couch surfing” from friend to friend because many did not plan or were unprepared to emancipate. Although one of the participants eventually planned to leave her foster mother’s home, she was asked to leave before she left on her own. The remaining participants saved money from jobs and remained self-supporting and independent. They continued to work and pursued college degrees. The participants described feeling self-confident as they emerged into adulthood. They got their own apartments or had roommates and formed personal and interpersonal relationships with friends and/or significant others. For Survivor, settling down as a wife and mother had its challenges, because she never lost the desire to return to school and earn her degree as an RN.

The research on employment outcomes for emancipated youths did not concur with the findings of this study. As has been discussed, all six participants worked while in foster care and stayed employed after emancipation. Their first jobs were not well paying, but they all supplemented their incomes by working two or three jobs, or working extra hours at the jobs they held. All six have been consistently employed since they became adults and the years employed range from 5 to 40.

As participants matured, each began to realize that they had a sense that their lives had a purpose outside themselves. Warrior’s initial purpose was to get herself, then her siblings out of foster care. She accomplished her goal and worked to get the remainder of her siblings out of foster care, but they emancipated before she was able to do so.

Although mentoring is an important component of success for foster youths, participants in the study depended on their own resources and self-confidence in pursuit of their goals. Throughout their dialogues, they spoke of the importance of working and

supporting themselves. Some experienced difficulties while working and attending school, but it never occurred to them to depend on welfare or ask their foster parents for financial assistance. All participants demonstrated social competence throughout their childhood, adolescence, late adolescence, and emerging adulthood. Social competence is the ability of an individual to make use of environmental and personal resources to achieve a good developmental outcome (Waters & Sroufe, 1983). Despite adversity, and a lack of environmental resources, participants demonstrated the ability to capitalize on the few resources available, including the assistance of mentors and community support from older women in the neighborhood. Social competence is also a characteristic of resiliency and participants had few problems in social situations and managing their lives with competency using available resources.

The participants believed in the ability to control their lives and planned professions that provided long-term support. Participants were able to make friends in their peer group, volunteer in the community and remain employed. They set positive goals for themselves, recognized their own strengths, took care of themselves, and were capable of asking for and accepting help when needed.

Many former foster youths do not have the social skills to capitalize on available resources or advocate for themselves to get their needs met. Many are not competent to deal with social situations to achieve good outcomes. A significant number of former foster youths suffer from mental health problems as a result of their foster-care experiences and lack the social skills to navigate life in a mature and socially aware manner.

There is little research on African American and Hispanic women in their mid-30s, 40s, and 60s who were former foster youths. The experiences of the participants does not concur with research on mature women who emancipated from foster care.

Discussion and Conclusions for Question 3

Research Question 3: What were the factors that contributed to life achievements, accomplishment of goals, and life satisfaction? Through dialogues between the participants and me, I identified self-determination and perception of oneself as a survivor.

The participants in the study were all determined to succeed and "not become a statistic." Most revealed that they knew they had to do better than their foster parents and that it "came somewhere within me" or "it was innate. I knew I was going to do better." Theories on self-determination differentiate the *content* of goals or outcomes and the *regulatory processes* through which the outcomes are pursued, making predictions for different contents and for different processes. The concept of *innate psychological needs* was used as a basis for integrating the differentiations of goal contents and regulatory processes and the predictions that resulted from those differentiations. According to SDT, a critical issue in the effects of goal pursuit and attainment concerns the degree to which people are able to satisfy their basic psychological needs as they pursue and attain their valued outcomes. The participants articulated that the determination to pursue a different and better life for themselves came from within, and most indicated that the idea wasn't conscious: "I just knew I had to do it."

The participants reconnected with their biological families once out of foster care. They reestablished relationships with their mother(s) and siblings. Survivor located

siblings who had been adopted. Nurturer came to the realization that her mother was "lost" to her but has maintained contact with her sisters. Buddha Nature's biological family members established contact with her, ultimately became close, and she was able to forgive them. Resilient Overcomer, Warrior, and Protector reconnected with their families and siblings as well. The importance of family cannot be emphasized enough, as all participants expressed that reconnecting with their family filled a long-felt void and provided them with a sense of belonging. Establishing and maintaining relationships with their mothers, extended family, and siblings provided closure and healing.

Participants' resiliency and self-determination evolved over time and they consciously made the decision not to have children before they were prepared to support them; they invested in themselves by pursuing educational goals. Most of the six waited to marry and limited the number of children they had. Research on girls who emancipate show that many become pregnant, are unemployed, or depend on welfare for financial assistance. One participant emphatically stated that she did not plan to be involved with CPS ever.

All participants accomplished the individual goals they set for themselves. A sense of purpose seemed an innate part of their personalities and they focused on purposive living and not on the effort and inner fortitude it took to overcome the challenges of foster care. As each participant reflected on their individual and collective journeys while in foster/kinship care and into adulthood, they expressed surprise when I commented on their strength and resiliency in overcoming the adversity each faced. Their reviews of the transcripts and participation in the study further validated how far they had come and all came away with a sense of pride in themselves. As they recalled significant

challenging times in their lives, and the determination and will it took to continue on despite difficult times, they began to acknowledge to themselves that they were more than "survivors" of foster care; they were winners and leaders.

Implications

There are more African American children in the child-welfare system than any other racial group in the United States. Decisions made by social workers, their supervisors, administrators, and policy makers affect them at every level. Little attention has been paid to the lived experiences of Black children in foster/kinship care despite the high numbers of children involved in the child-welfare system.

Throughout the history of their involvement with the child-welfare system, African American children and their families have been marginalized and ignored in mainstream research agendas. Although a growing body of literature has proposed new ways of thinking about the needs of children and offered new strategies for social work practices, diverse childhood experiences of African American youths have been neglected. There is a lack of qualitative research on the perspectives of children in care and the myriad ways their lives have been impacted by factors beyond their control. Research addressing the needs of children is lacking and more information about their experiences and resiliency would add a needed depth and dimension to the studies.

Rather than perceiving children in foster care as "problems" to be ignored, social work professionals would benefit if they shifted their focus and viewed youths as competent witnesses to their own life. African Americans live in a society that undervalues their personhood and they receive little acknowledgement on their competence and abilities to narrate their lived experiences. Giving voice to groups that

have historically been silenced along the lines of race, gender, and marginalization will have a profound impact in social work theory and practice. African American children are pathologized in psychology and sociology through a deficit model with little attention paid to race and oppression. Race as a social construct has come under scrutiny in recent years and issues of power and oppression in the everyday lives of African American children has not been included.

Children and youths can speak for themselves about their own lives, and collecting data can have important implications for African American youths. They have various experiences, perceptions, and needs, but most have remained on the outside of research agendas. All approaches do not include the specific perspectives of African American children, and their inclusion can offer a unique and important contribution to research. There is a significant need to include their perspectives on services they receive and concerns about their future. Their inclusion and participation could ensure that they receive more equitable treatment resulting in positive outcomes in most sectors. Additionally, research of African American youths' experiences in care would provide a more inclusive picture of social welfare and an invaluable source of material across the spectrum of their experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following suggestions for future research are based on themes that emerged from the findings and are suggested to add to the paucity of research on experiences of former foster youths who aged out of foster care.

The intersection between racism, oppression, and childhood studies are complex, varied, and intertwined. However, despite key changes in social work theory and

practices with children, the voices of youth in care have been ignored. The narratives of children will offer an invaluable perspective of Black children in foster care. African American children continue to be overrepresented in the child-welfare system but little is known about their perspectives and experiences while in care. Further research is necessary to expand our knowledge of the psychological and emotional impact disproportionality has on the children in foster care.

Despite the fact that over 31% of African American children live in foster care and are 14% of the child population (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011), this fact goes unnoticed by most Americans. Children and youth continue to suffer poorer outcomes than their White counterparts. Disproportionality has been researched for decades, yet continues to be a problem in child welfare. Although policies are in place to provide monetary incentives to foster parents, funding to maintain children in their families is nonexistent. Policy mandates and funding are inadequate to meet the legislative and bureaucratic demands placed on them. Social work has been subjected to legislative, political, and economic policies that have changed the landscape of social welfare. The United States has been unmotivated to provide funding that will allow children to remain in-home with their families rather than in foster care. Race and ethnicity have been ignored in major research studies. There are serious gaps in the law and family-reunification services and there is a need for major reforms. Despite specific references to the reasons for disproportionality and disparate treatment of African American youth in foster care, interest in finding solutions has been minimal.

Research on factors that contribute to successful outcomes for children and youth while in foster care and after emancipation is needed. Studies should be conducted on the

relationship between child welfare and education systems to determine the extent to which those external systems may or may not contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in child welfare. Studies on the narratives of African American children and youth in foster care and beyond should be incorporated into studies using qualitative methods.

Studies on assessment and innovative strategies designed to prevent and reduce racial disproportionality in child welfare is needed. There is a scarcity of knowledge that comprehensively describes the importance of familial relationships on foster youth's emotional and psychological well-being after placement in foster care and is an area that has received scant attention in research. But more importantly, studies on African American girls and the intersection of gender, race, and class would provide a theoretical framework for the field of social work and the human sciences. There is much that can be learned from youths in foster care, particularly young women whose voices have been silenced for far too long. Providing a platform for their stories will encourage foster youths to use their potential and defy the statistics.

Concluding Thoughts

I knew, years ago, after I became a social worker, that I wanted to learn more about the child-welfare system because there were so many elements that troubled me personally and professionally. I felt that returning to school would be the best way to find answers to the many questions that concerned me about the child-welfare system's treatment of African American families and children. When I began this journey, I did not know where it would lead, I did not know what to expect, but I was open to giving my energy to the experience and learning as much as I could to ultimately effect change

in the system. The interesting classes I took helped me develop a clearer idea about my research proposal, and, perhaps serendipitously, six caring women agreed to be interviewed for my research project. All of them expressed a concern for all the children who came into the foster-care system, and they were mindful that their voices would provide an "insider's" perspective on foster care that was not the negative as portrayed in articles and the media. Specifically, they wanted to share their stories with me to let foster youths know that they could have a better life, and that foster care was not a life sentence. All of them were successful in their own right, and I was intrigued and wanted to learn from them to improve my practice and pass it on to the children in my caseload.

My curiosity and desire to understand the extent and content of their subjective experiences was sincere and we quickly developed a trusting relationship that added depth and richness to the dialogues. Before I actually formed my questions as part of the interview, I was interested to explore how they overcame difficult challenges, given the time periods they were in care. All participants were gracious, warm, and open as they invited me into their shared past and revealed experiences that shocked me, shook me, made me laugh, and made me tearful after we were finished for the day.

As the participants shared their individual experiences, long-held traumas never spoken outside their families, surfaced. Though I knew four of the participant as acquaintances and two as lunch buddies prior to the taped dialogues, a trusting warm relationship developed between us and we had an easy, professional, rapport and the interview room became a sacred space. I was profoundly moved and filled with humility during the interview process. I noticed similarities and differences as I listened to each woman tell her story in her own voice. They later shared that they felt empowered "after

getting it out." As each interview ended, I began to understand how resilient, strong, and kind they were. I mentioned my observation to them and it was a surprise to both of us that they had not recognized it in themselves. They were very happy to have participated in this body of work and I am ever grateful to them all.

Throughout the research process it became apparent to me how deeply imbedded laws and policies are based on race and gender bias and I was disheartened at times. My perceptions about child welfare underwent a radical change and I found myself balking against placing children in "least restrictive" environments with relatives, without questioning the decision. I realized as I delved deeper into the research that the child-welfare system is not based on fairness. My entire perception has changed and I can no longer take it for granted that decisions made on every level would be in the best interest of the child or their parents.. I have become hypervigilant about my own child-welfare practices and oppose decisions made without regard for the impact on families and children. Over time, I have come to terms with what I need to do and plan to do further research in those areas that have troubled me the most.

In conclusion, I have learned much about myself as an African American woman and researcher during this process. It has opened my eyes, and I raise questions that are uncomfortable because the status quo is no longer sufficient for me. I intend to share what I have learned and am collaborating with others in the field of education and social welfare.

The experiences of participants impacted me in ways I did not know were possible and I am thankful that they took the time to share very personal aspects of their lives. The participants reported feeling empowered after having been marginalized in

foster care. They are proud to have been a part of this very important project and I was proud to have included them.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: IRBPHS INITIAL APPLICATION

Name of Applicant: Marie E Moore
USF Identification Number: 10089223
University Title: Doctoral Student
School or College: School of Education
Department or Group: International and Multicultural Education
Home or Campus Address: 6415 Schmidt Lane, B208, El Cerrito, CA 94530
Home Phone: 510-527-0727
Work Phone: 510-268-2237
Electronic Mail Address(s): moorema@acgov.org; numbersage@comcast.net
Name(s) and University Title(s) of Other Investigators: None
Name of Faculty Advisor: Dr. Betty Taylor
University Title: Professor
Home or Campus Address: USF, School of Education, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA, 94117-1071
Home or Campus Phone: 415-422-6041
Electronic Mail Address(s): taylorb@usfca.edu
Project Title: Mature Women Beyond Foster Care: Narratives on Factors Contributing To Subjective Well Being and Life Sustaining Skills.

_____

Signature of Applicant Date

_____

Signature of Faculty Advisor* Date

*Your signature indicates that you accept responsibility for the research described, including work by students under your supervision. It further attests that you are fully aware of all procedures to be followed, will monitor the research, and will notify the IRBPHS of any significant problems or changes.

1. Background and Rationale

It is a well-known and vigorously researched fact that in the United States, children of color belonging to various racial, ethnic, and cultural groups are disproportionately overrepresented in the foster-care system. Youths who age out of the foster-care system experience significantly poorer outcomes than White youths because "the child welfare system has always discriminated against African American children and their families" (Roberts, 2002**)**. Studies show that African American and Native American children have been subjected to disparate and inequitable treatment on all levels of federal, state, and local governments' laws and policies. The overrepresentation of children of color in the social service systems is linked to social, class, and economic factors. However, research shows that the average African American child is not at any greater risk for abuse and neglect than the average Caucasian child (Ards et al., 1995; Sedlak & Schultz, 2001).

African American, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander children have a disproportionately higher rate of maltreatment investigations when compared to Caucasians **(**Fluke et al., 2002). Disproportionality occurs when a group of children and youths is represented at higher rates at various stages of decision making in the child-welfare system than in the general population (Magruder & Shaw, 2008). Racial disparities are evident at every critical point in child welfare. Reporting agencies such as hospitals report Black women more than Whites have newborns tested positive for drugs; schools make reports to Child Protective Services (CPS) for Black students more frequently than White students and Black families' CPS referrals are substantiated at higher rates than those of White children (Hill, 2005). Studies show that African American children enter foster care at a higher rate and remain in foster care longer, which contributes to overrepresentation because the numbers of Black children in care increases in any given year (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, [AFCARS], 2007). Studies also found that even when controlling for risk and poverty, in addition to other relevant factors, race affects the decision about whether to provide services or remove children from their families.

African American women who aged out of foster care and are living self-sustaining lives are small in number and there is a absence of research on their experiences after leaving care. Although there is a plethora of research on the disproportionate overrepresentation of African American children in the child-welfare system, there is a dearth of research on mature women who are leading productive lives despite the numerous deficits of having been in the foster-care system. Many adolescent girls lack the skills to navigate their independence after emancipation, become pregnant, and end up on welfare, thereby continuing a cycle of CPS involvement for their own child. Some girls resort to prostitution or gang involvement as a means to earn money to support themselves and others become involved with the juvenile-justice system. In California, 67% of females who emancipated from the child-welfare system had at least one child within 5 years of leaving care (Needell, Cuccaro-Alamin, Brokkhart, Jackman, & Shlonsky, 2002).

This study seeks to expand current thinking beyond the traditional classifications of success and as such develop the construction of a comprehensive theory of women's

agency to overcome and persevere despite adversity. Success, as determined by "normative" standards, embodies the idea that successful individuals have had their psychological, material, and emotional needs met through crucial developmental stages, were raised in a family consisting of two parents, a suitable home, with love and nurturance. African American adolescent girls who age out of the foster-care system don't have "normative" standards on which to thrive and grow, but face overwhelming challenges and many fail to survive the onslaught of adulthood without crippling consequences. The outlook and outcomes for Black children in foster care is dismal at best, and after emancipation, little is known about their lives after they reach adulthood, beyond their 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s. The lived experiences, perceptions, and influences that helped foster-care alum strive for a better life will generate dialogue that could potentially provide a model for youths aging out of the foster-care system and offer a measure of hope that they, too, can survive and have a better life.

The purpose of this study is (a) to examine the foster-care system through a historical construct, focusing on the overrepresentation of Black children in foster care and the extent to which the federal, state, and local laws and policies contribute to institutionalized racism against children of color and their families; (b) to examine the oppressive nature and scope of racial and ethnic disparity and how it has impacted children of color through the lens of oppression theory; (c) to understand the perceptions, challenges and lived experiences of mature women formerly in foster care in their own voice; and (d) to explore the factors that influenced the development of life-sustaining skills in overcoming the challenges of being in foster care.

2. Description of Sample

The participant sample will consist of 12 African American women who were former foster youths who aged out of the foster-care system. The women met the following criteria:

1. The participants chosen for this study are women between the ages of mid-30s to mid-60s, who were all in foster care and aged out of the foster-care system.
2. Were former foster youth who are employed and are living productive lives;
3. Graduated from high school; have had some college, were enrolled in college, or have graduated from college;
4. Between the ages of mid 30s to mid 60s;
5. No overt signs of mental health problems or substance abuse and did not have a child while a teen;
6. No current or former involvement with law enforcement.

It is the intent of this researcher to interview 10 participants, 9 who are known to the researcher through the social-services agency where I work and one through an Internet search. All participants except one are African American, and all live in the San Francisco Bay Area.

3. Recruitment Procedure

I have solicited participation from persons known to me through face-to-face requests, U.S. mail, and e-mails.

4. Subject-Consent Process

All participants in this study will be voluntary. No parental consent is necessary because all of the participants are over 18 years of age. The project will require at least three face-to-face meetings. I will provide cover letters, consent forms, and a copy of the interview protocol at the initial face-to-face meeting with participants.

5. Procedures

I initially contacted the participants in person during work hours and informed them of the research study and inquired whether they were interested in participating in the study. The women who agreed to participate in the study were prescreened to verify that they met the criteria to volunteer. Upon IRBPHS approval, I will contact participants to schedule the initial face-to-face contact to provide them a copy of the interview protocol. The participants will have the opportunity to process, reflect on, answer, and ask any questions or to clear up any confusion. After the initial face-to-face meeting, I will schedule times for the participants to be interviewed.

All interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed verbatim, only eliminating unnecessary tics and noises. When transcribing the interviews, I will provide pseudonyms to protect confidentiality of the participants and all other parties who might be identified. Once the interviews are transcribed, I will analyze the data. Codes have not been developed for this study at this point, but will be included in analyzing the data for themes of importance.

This research project does not have any interventions or manipulations that the participants will experience. This project does not involve collecting other data about the participants other than stated in this IRBPHS.

6. Potential Risks to Subjects

The narratives and reflective memories of the participants in this research study may result in some emotional discomfort for some of them as long dormant and deep-seated emotions associated with the foster care experience may surface. Some may feel psychologically exposed and vulnerable while discussing their experiences as former foster youth to me, a child-welfare worker. Perhaps some of the participants might feel conflicted for being a part of the very system that did so little to assist them when they needed it.

Every possible effort will be made to protect their confidentially under the law and I am well aware of the law's requirements, as a mandated reporter.

7. Minimization of Potential Risk

I will attempt to minimize emotional discomfort, frustration, or painful memories by providing the interview questions to the participants 2 weeks prior to the interview. I will make every effort to keep the lines of communication open by providing phone numbers and e-mail addresses. The dialogue between participants and me will be recorded, transcribed and coded for themes or categories. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times.

8. Potential Benefits to Subjects

Through narrative qualitative research approach, participants will be allowed to express and name their world, articulate their experiences and, in retrospect, reflect on how, through their own inner strength, motivation, and sense of purpose, they gained a sense of empowerment and liberation through praxis. Additional benefits will include the results of this study, and how the information will contribute to a deeper understanding of welfare policies and how they have contributed to disproportionate treatment of children of color systemically and address efforts to effect significant changes in the child-welfare system. Unexpected benefits could potentially give adolescent girls hope that they, too, can survive in spite of foster care.

9. Costs to Subjects

There is no cost to participants other than time and effort given for the interviews, meetings, phone calls (if needed), and reviewing of the transcription. Each interview will be approximately 2 to 2.5 hours in length, recorded in a quiet, convenient location where sensitive and personal dialogue can be conducted with minimal distractions or disturbances.

10. Reimbursements/Compensation to Subjects

There will be no reimbursement or compensation given to the participants. Participants will be made aware of this and the consent form will address this information.

11. Confidentiality of Records

I will develop an informed-consent form for participants to sign before they engage in the research. Participants will have the right to refuse to participate and withdraw at any time. All data collected will be kept confidential. Interviews with the participants will be recorded with the use of digital audio or video recordings, which will be transcribed and kept in a locked and secure location at the researcher's home office. Participants will remain anonymous throughout the research and beyond and will have pseudonym names to protect their identity. Confidentiality of the participant will be protected as far as possible under the law; however, participation in research may mean a loss of some privacy.

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Purpose and Background

Marie E Moore, a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, is conducting a study on mature women who were formerly in foster care and are now living self-fulfilling lives. The researcher will explore the lives of the participants, focusing on their personal experiences while in the foster care system, the perceived impact of their foster care experience, and those factors that influenced the decisions and motivations to thrive in spite of transitioning out of foster care. This study will also explore current outcomes for Black children in foster care, compared to the participants' experiences after emancipation, as little is known about foster care alum lives after they reach adulthood, beyond their 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s. The lived experiences, perceptions and influences that helped foster care alum to strive for a better life will generate dialogue that could potentially provide a model for youths aging out of foster care system and offer a measure of hope that they, too, can survive and have a better life.

I am being asked to participate because I meet the following criteria:

1. Were African American or Hispanic female former foster youth who are employed and are living productive lives;
2. Graduated from high school; have had some college, are enrolled in college or have graduated from college;
3. Between the ages of mid 30s to mid 60s;
4. No overt signs of mental health problems or substance abuse and did not have a child while a teen;
5. No current or former involvement with law enforcement;
6. Willing to participate in one-on-one recorded, open-ended interviews for this study.

Procedures

If I agree to participate in this study, the following will happen:

1. I will participate in a dialogue with the researcher.
2. I will be asked to participate in an open-ended dialogue in which I will collaborate with the researcher and respond to interview questions regarding my personal experiences as a former foster youth and those factors that influenced the motivation, perseverance and development of life sustaining skills after foster care.
3. I will process, reflect on, and answer the interview questions.
4. I will clarify, reflect, and review the transcribed dialogue with the researcher.
5. If I agree, video or audio recordings will be made of these conversations.

6. This research will be conducted in a quiet, neutral, convenient location, in order to control the environment and allow safe, open dialogue with minimal distractions and/or disturbances.

Risks/Discomforts

1. Some of the questions could potentially cause an emotional response or may bring up unpleasant memories, but I will be able to stop the conversation anytime I feel uncomfortable.
2. Some of the questions and reflections may make me fee uncomfortable or upset, but I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to or to stop the dialogue at any time.
3. Confidentiality: Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Dialogues will be kept as confidential as possible and all interview results, transcripts, and recordings will be kept in a locked and secure location at the researcher's home office. No individual identities will be used and all records will be kept in confidential files in the researcher's home office. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from this study. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the participant. By law and profession, the researcher is considered to be a mandated reporter of child and elder abuse, and should reasonable suspicion of such behaviors arise during the course of collecting data, the researcher is obligated to report suspicion of neglect or abuse.

Benefits

While there will be no direct benefit to you for participating in this research study, the anticipated benefit of this study will be (a) the use of your personal stories and experiences will bring an increased awareness and depth to the needs of current and former foster youth; (b) the factors that influenced key decisions in overcoming the deficits of foster care will help enhance appropriate services for current foster youth, specifically focusing on the needs of girls; and (c) become an inspiration for current youths in foster care. There will be no cost to you as a result of participating in this study, nor will you be reimbursed for taking part in this study.

Alternatives
I am free to choose not to participate in this study.

Costs/Financial Considerations
There will be no financial costs to be charged for my participation in this study.

Reimbursement
I will not be reimbursed or paid for my participation in this study.

Questions

I have talked to Marie E Moore about this study, and have had my questions answered. If I have any further questions about this study, I may call her at home (510) 527-0727 or e-mail her at either of these addresses: numbersage@comcast.net or moorema@acgov.org.

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk to the researcher. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact IRBPHS, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling 415-422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Counseling Psychology, Education Bldg., University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

APPENDIX C: UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO CONSENT COVER LETTER

September 5, 2011

Dear Research Participant:

My name is Marie E Moore and I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco. I am conducting research on mature women who were formerly in foster care and how their perceptions, challenges and lived experiences influenced the development of life skills in overcoming the challenges of being in foster care. The researcher will also explore those factors that influenced the motivation, perseverance, and fortitude to carry on despite disparate treatment, lack of resources and probable racism some of the participants might have unknowingly experienced.

You are being asked to participate in this research study because you: (1) were former foster youth who is employed and are living productive lives; (2) graduated from high school; have had some college, are enrolled in college or have graduated from college; (3) are between the ages of mid 30s to mid 60s; (4) have no overt signs of mental health problems or substance abuse issues and did not have a child while a teen after emancipation; (5) have had no current or former involvement with law enforcement; (6) and are willing to participate in one-on-one recorded, open-ended interviews for this study. I obtained your names through personal relationships, networking and Internet searches. If you agree to participate in this study, you will complete the attached Consent Form, enclose it in a pre-addressed, pre-stamped envelope, and return to me.

I am requesting your assistance in completing this research project by asking for us to have a dialogue, to be used as an opportunity for your voices to be heard through your stories and reflections about your individual foster care experience(s). The challenges of being in foster care, in and of itself, is a tribute to your individuality, pursuit of individual goals and preparation for your future, then moving forward to accomplish your goals. Some of the interview questions may make you feel uncomfortable, but you can always decline to answer any question you do not feel that you wish to answer. You may also stop participation at any time.

Our first meeting will last approximately one and a half to two hours. It will occur at a time and location convenient for the researcher and participant. I will audio and video-record tape our conversation (if there is no objection) and it will be transcribed. After the interview has been transcribed, I will provide you a copy of the transcript to review and ask for your feedback. We will schedule a follow-up appointment to review the transcript, make any changes or additions if needed, and further discuss your reflections. If at any time a break is needed, know that you can do so whenever you want or need to.

Your participation in this research study may mean a loss of confidentiality. I will protect your identity by using a pseudonym and not your real name. The recordings will be kept as confidential as possible, and all information will be coded and kept in locked files at

my home office. Individual results will not be shared with your employer where you work.

The anticipated benefits to you for participating in this study will be the use of your reflections, experiences and stories to foster ambition in adolescent girls preparing to emancipate from foster care. Your perceptions and life experiences will encourage and inspire young women in care to become goal directed and to think for themselves as they begin to understand their purpose in life. It is hoped that your life experiences will initiate dialogue in welfare agencies to enhance the services for children in foster care, focusing on the youth's strengths rather than their deficits. There will be no cost to you as a result of taking part in this study, nor will you be reimbursed for participating in this study.

If you have any questions or comments about this research, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone (510) 527-0727 or e-mail moorema@acgov.org or numbersage@comcast.net. If you have further questions about the study, you may contact the IRBPHS at the University of San Francisco, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing the IRBPHS, Department of Counseling Psychology, Education Building, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to participate in this study and may withdraw at any point in time. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future status as an employee at the same agency as the researcher. Thank you for your time, attention, and participation in this study. If you do agree to participate, please complete, sign and return the consent form to me in the self- addressed, stamped envelope.

I appreciate your cooperation and interest in participating in this research study about mature women and the development of life sustaining skills beyond foster care. The factors that influenced the pursuit of goals despite the challenges of foster care is an understudied phenomenon. The stories and reflections of your experiences is an important starting point in recognizing that being in foster care doesn't always result in negative outcomes.

Sincerely yours;

Marie E Moore
Doctoral Candidate, University of San Francisco

Participant's Signature Date

Researcher's Signature Date

APPENDIX D: RESEARCH SUBJECTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

The rights below are the rights of every person who is asked to be in a research study. As a research subject, I have the following rights:

Research subjects can expect:

- To be told the extent to which confidentiality of records, identifying the subject will be maintained and of the possibility that specified individuals, internal and external regulatory agencies, or study sponsors may inspect information in the medical record specifically related to participation in the clinical trial.
- To be told of any benefits that may reasonably be expected from the research.
- To be told of any reasonably foreseeable discomforts or risks.
- To be told of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment that might be of benefit to the subject.
- To be told of the procedures to be followed during the course of participation, especially those experimental in nature.
- To be told that they may refuse to participate (participation is voluntary), and that declining to participate will not compromise access to services and will not result in penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled.
- To be told about compensation and medical treatment if research related injury occurs and where further information may be obtained when participating in research involving more than minimal risk.
- To be told whom to contact to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research, about the research subjects' rights and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject.
- To be told of anticipated circumstances under which the investigator, without regard to the subject's consent, may terminate the subject's participation.
- To be told of any additional costs to the subject that may result from participation in the research.
- To be told of the consequences of a subjects' decision to withdraw from the research and procedures for orderly termination of participation by the subject.
- To be told that significant new findings developed during the course of the research that may relate to the subject's willingness to continue participation will be provided to the subject.
- To be told the approximate number of subjects involved in the study.
- To be told what the study is trying to find out.
- To be told what will happen to me and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
- To be told about the frequent and/or important risks, side effects, or discomforts of the things that will happen to me for research purposes.
- To be told if I can expect any benefit from participating, and, if so, what the benefit might be.

- To be told of the other choices I have and how they may be better or worse than being in the study: To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
- To be told what sort of medical or psychological treatment is available if any complications arise.
- To refuse to participate at all or to change my mind about participation after the study is started; if I were to make such a decision, it will not affect my right to receive the care or privileges I would receive if I were not in the study.
- To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form, and
- To be free of pressure when considering whether I wish to agree to be in the study.

If I have other questions, I should ask the researcher for answers. In addition, I may contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS by calling (415) 422-6091, by e-mail at IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to USF IRBPHS, Counseling Psychology Department, Education Building, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1071.

APPENDIX E: SAMPLE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Participant*: _____

Pseudo: To protect identity:_____

*Consent Form must be signed, dated and returned to researcher prior to interview.

Personal Background:

- What is your ethnic and racial background?
- Where were you born? Do you have siblings and if so, how many?
- What is your current age? Place of employment? Length of time employed?
- What is your marital status? Children? How many?
- What do you do for entertainment? Hobbies? Interests? Extracurricular activities?

Reflections on Foster Care Experience:

Initial Removal from parent(s)

- At which age were you removed from your family and placed in foster care?
- Were you removed from your mother, father, or both parents?
- Did you have siblings? How many? Were your siblings removed as well?
- If you had siblings, were you placed together or in different homes?
- Were you placed in a relative's home, foster home, or group home?
- Describe your emotions during that time and do you feel that your feelings mattered?

Initial Placement in Foster Care

- How much contact did you have with your parents or other family members?
- Do you know if your parents were offered Family Reunification Services? If yes, did you ever return to your parent's home to live after foster care? If no, did anyone explain why?
- How long were you in foster care? Were you able to stay in one placement or did you have to move once, frequently or did you stayed in your first placement? If you moved, was it by mutual agreement between you and the foster parent; your decision, or the social worker's? What impact did it have on you?

Perceived Disparate Treatment:

- Was your foster parent the same race/ethnicity as you? If the foster parent was the same race/ethnicity as you, were you treated humanely or were you stigmatized as the "foster kid?"
- What race/ethnicity was your social worker? Do you feel she treated you humanely? Did you ever feel that you were discriminated against while in foster care? If so, by whom?
- Were you informed of your right to an attorney after removal from your parents? Were you informed that you had Children's Rights? Was your social worker helpful? Will you describe your interactions with your social worker? Your attorney and his response to you and your needs? The teachers at schools you attended? Health care? Were you referred to the Independent Living Skills Program? If so, was it helpful to you?
- Reflecting back, would you say that you received disparate treatment and might have been discriminated against while in foster care?
- What were the most challenging aspects of growing up in foster care? What were the most memorable? What were the most challenging aspects (if any) of emancipation? What were the most memorable?

Mentors, Support System and Educational Goals:

Factors influencing development of self- preservation

- What goals did you set for yourself?
- How did you develop self-confidence?
- Was there anyone you could go to when things got tough? An adult? A peer? A Teacher? How important were mentors or caring adults in your life?
- When did you feel that you would survive foster care and start to make plans for your future? Do you feel your personality development helped your self-esteem?
- How many schools did you attend while in foster care? Did you maintain an adequate Grade Point Average (GPA)? Reflect back on your years in Elementary school? In Middle School? In High School? Did you feel that your status as a child in foster care held you back? Did you receive help with your homework from your foster parent? The teacher? Anyone? Did you work while in high school? Did you maintain your GPA? Did you graduate? Did you have plans to work or go to college?
- When did you decide to enroll in college? Was there anyone to offer you assistance in filling out forms, etc.? If you enrolled in college, were you informed that would receive benefits as a former foster child?
- How helpful was your social worker when it was time for you to emancipate from care? What were you told? Were you given any financial assistance? Housing? Employment information?

Emerging Adulthood

- After emancipation from foster care, what did you do? Where did you go? Who supported you? How did you survive? What did you do to control your

adolescent impulsivity? Were you ever afraid of losing control of your life? How important was being in charge of your own life to you?

- If you decided to go to work, how difficult was it for you find a job on your own, or with help from an employment agency or from your counselor from high school? Was the process of applying for college challenging?
- Did you return to your parent's home after emancipation or did you go and live on your own? Did you have more or less contact with your relatives while in care? Were you supported by anyone in your family after emancipation? Did you maintain contact with your siblings?
- When times got tough, what gave you strength? Who could you lean on? Did you have a special friend you could call on?
- How did you stay motivated to keep moving forward? Did you change your goals over time or did you refine your goals? What was your state of mind at that time?
- How was your sense of self-confidence developed? How did you handle anger? Sorrow? Happiness? Sadness? What emotional support system did you establish with important people in your life?

Growing Older and Living Life:

Goals and career aspirations

- When did you decide that you wanted to be in your current profession? How many professions have you worked?
- Did you find it easier to leave your foster care experiences behind and never think about it or bring it up, or did you seek therapy to deal with the trauma of being in care?
- How did your life change after leaving foster care?
- When you reflect back on your foster care experience, what did you aspire to achieve? Did you dream of a better life for yourself? How did you feel about having children? Did you hesitate to have children because of your experiences in foster care? What type of relationship do you have with your children? Do you parent differently from the way you were parented?
- As an adult, did you ascribe to socially acceptable behaviors to be socially acceptable? Do you consider yourself adaptable/flexible? Has it helped you overcome challenges?
- Did you believe in the ability to control your life? How satisfied with your life were you? Did you feel dissatisfaction and impatience?
- When did you develop a significant relationship with another adult as you matured and how did your foster care experiences impact the relationship? Do you find it difficult to trust people? How has being in foster care impacted your relationship with your children (if you have children)? Your significant other, partner or husband?
- Do you recognize your own strength? Are you more or less empathetic with children in care? Social workers? Foster care system?
- What would you say to young girls in foster care now? How would you offer support to them? How would you encourage them to persevere despite foster care?

Influences, Faith and Spirituality

Who or what influenced you the most?

Who were the people who influenced you the most while in care? What helped you become goal directed? Do you see the benefit of mentoring? How has faith sustained you and was it important in your formative years? Did you attend church? Were you encouraged to talk about your spirituality and/or faith? Do you believe that faith helped you get to where you are now? Do you have spiritual practices that help you face each day with gratitude and resolve?

Did you attend church while in foster care?

How important is religion in your life now? While in foster care?

Spirituality

Discuss the significance between spirituality and religion and what it means to you. Do you think your faith in a higher Being (if that is your belief) helped you overcome the challenges of foster care? What would you tell other young girls now that you are older and wiser? For what are you most grateful for?

APPENDIX F: INFORMATION SHEET ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

My name is Marie E Moore and I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco. I am conducting research on mature women who were formerly in foster care and how their perceptions, challenges and lived experiences influenced the development of life skills in overcoming the challenges of being in foster care. The researcher will also explore those factors that influenced the motivation, perseverance, and fortitude to carry on despite disparate treatment, lack of resources and probable racism some of the participants might have unknowingly experienced.

It is a well-known and vigorously researched fact that in the United States, children of color belonging to various racial, ethnic, and cultural groups are disproportionately overrepresented in the foster care system. Youths who age out of the foster care system experience significantly poorer outcomes than whites youths because "the child welfare system has always discriminated against African American children and their families" (Roberts, 2002**)**. Studies show that African American and Native American children have been subjected to disparate and inequitable treatment on all levels of federal, state, and local governments' laws and policies. The overrepresentation of children of color in the social service systems is linked to social, class and economic factors. However, research shows that the average African American child is not at any greater risk for abuse and neglect than the average white child. (Sedlak & Schultz, 2001; Ards, 1995).

African American, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander children have a disproportionately higher rate of maltreatment investigations when compared to whites **(**Fluke, et al., 2002). Disproportionality occurs when a group of children and youth is represented at higher rates at various stages of decision-making in the child welfare system than in the general population (Magruder & Shaw, 2008). Racial disparities are evident at every critical point in child welfare. Reporting agencies such as hospitals report Black women more than whites when their newborns tested positive for drugs; schools make reports to Child Protective Services (CPS) for Black students more frequently than White students and Black families' CPS referrals are substantiated at higher rates than white children (Hill, 2005). Studies show that African American children enter foster care at a higher rate and remain in foster care longer, which contributes to overrepresentation because the numbers of Black children in care increases in any given year (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, [AFCARS], 2007). Studies also found that even when controlling for risk and poverty, in addition to other relevant factors, race affects the decision whether to provide services or remove children from their families.

African American women who aged out of foster care and are living self -sustaining lives are small in number and there is a absence of research on their experiences after leaving care. While there is a plethora of research on the disproportionate overrepresentation of African American children in the child welfare system, there is a dearth of research on mature women who are leading productive lives despite the numerous deficits of being in the foster care system. Many adolescent girls lack the skills to navigate their independence after emancipation and become pregnant, and end up on welfare, thus

continuing a cycle of Child Protective Service involvement for their own child. Some girls resort to prostitution or gang involvement as a means to earn money to support them selves and others become involved with the Juvenile Justice system. In California, 67% of females who emancipated from the child welfare system had at least one child within five years after leaving care (Needell, Cuccaro-Alamin, Brookhart, Jackman, & Shlonsky, 2002).

This study seeks to expand current thinking beyond the traditional classifications of success and as such develop the construction of a comprehensive theory of women's agency to overcome and persevere despite adversity. African American adolescent girls who age out of the foster care face system overwhelming challenges and many fail to survive the onslaught of adulthood without crippling consequences. The outlook and outcomes for Black children in foster care is dismal at best, and after emancipation, little is known about their lives after they reach adulthood, beyond their 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s. The lived experiences, perceptions and influences that helped foster care alum to strive for a better life will generate dialogue that could potentially provide a model for youths aging out of the foster care system and offer a measure of hope that they, too, can survive and have a better life.

You are being asked to participate in this research study because you: (1) were former foster youth who is employed and are living productive lives; (2) graduated from high school; have had some college, are enrolled in college or have graduated from college; (3) are between the ages of mid 30s to mid 60s; (4) have no overt signs of mental health problems or substance abuse issues and did not have a child while a teen after emancipation; (5) have had no current or former involvement with law enforcement; (6) and are willing to participate in one-on-one recorded, open-ended interviews for this study. I obtained your names through personal relationships, networking and Internet searches. If you agree to participate in this study, you will complete the attached Consent Form, enclose it in a pre-addressed, pre-stamped envelope, and return to me.

I am requesting your assistance in completing this research project by asking for us to have a dialogue, to be used as an opportunity for your voices to be heard through your stories and reflections about your individual foster care experience(s). The challenges of being in foster care, in and of itself, is a tribute to your individuality, pursuit of individual goals and preparation for your future, then moving forward to accomplish your goals. Some of the interview questions may make you feel uncomfortable, but you can always decline to answer any question you do not feel that you wish to answer. You may also stop participation at any time.

The anticipated benefits to you for participating in this study will be the use of your reflections, experiences and stories to foster ambition in adolescent girls preparing to emancipate from foster care. Your perceptions and life experiences will encourage and inspire young women in care to become goal directed and to think for themselves as they begin to understand their purpose in life. It is hoped that your life experiences will initiate dialogue in welfare agencies to enhance the services for children in foster care, focusing

on the youth's strengths rather than their deficits. There will be no cost to you as a result of taking part in this study, nor will you be reimbursed for participating in this study.

If you have any questions or comments about this research, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone (510) 527-0727 or e-mail moorema@acgov.org or numbersage@comcast.net. If you have further questions about the study, you may contact the IRBPHS at the University of San Francisco, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing the IRBPHS, Department of Counseling Psychology, Education Building, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to participate in this study and may withdraw at any point in time. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future status as an employee at the same agency as the researcher. Thank you for your time, attention, and participation in this study. If you do agree to participate, please complete, sign and return the consent form to me in the self- addressed, stamped envelope.

APPENDICES G: STAGES

1. Personal Background

1. What is your ethnic and racial background?
2. Where were you born?
3. Do you have siblings and if so, how many?
4. What is your current age?
5. Place of employment and number of years employed?
6. What is your marital status?
7. Do you have children, and if so how many?
8. What do you do for entertainment?

2. Life Before, During and After Emancipation From Foster Care

1. Describe your home life prior to foster care? How old were you?
2. Did you have siblings and were they removed as well?
3. Were you and your siblings placed together or in different foster homes?
4. Were you placed with relatives, foster or group home?
5. Did you have contact with your parents after removal? Was visitation court ordered for you or your siblings?
6. Do you know if your parents were offered Family Reunification Services?
7. Were you ever returned to your parent's home?
8. How long were you in foster care?
9. How often were you moved to different foster homes and if so, why?
10. How did foster care affect you ?

11. Were you enrolled in the same school while in foster care? How many schools did you attend? How well did you do academically?
12. Did you have contact with your social worker? How often?
13. Was/were the foster parent (s) the same race/ethnicity as you?
14. Describe your experiences with the foster parent, group home or relatives.
15. What were the most challenging aspects of being in foster care?
16. What were the most memorable aspects of growing up in foster care?
17. Did your foster care experience impact your relationship with your parents?
18. What is your relationship with your parents now?

3. Emerging Adulthood; Support/Mentors; Educational Goals; Career Aspirations

1. After emancipation from foster care, what did you do and where did you go?
2. Was there anyone you could depend on when things got tough?
3. Were there any important adults in your life who supported/mentored you?
4. Did you feel that you would survive after foster care?
5. Did you set goals for yourself?
6. Who do you feel cared about you? Were they available when you needed them?
7. After High School, did you have plans to work and/or attend college?
8. Were there teachers or counselors to help you along the way?
9. How did you manage?
10. When did you set your educational goals?
11. When did you decide to enroll in college and what was that experience like?
12. Were your social workers helpful in any capacity to assist you?

13. Did you feel that you had control over your life after emancipation?
14. What coping strategies did you utilize to deal with stressors in your life?
15. What factors (internal/external) influenced you to get to where you are today?
16. How did you develop self- confidence?
17. Did you consciously set goals for yourself?
18. How did you develop self -confidence/ self -esteem?
19. What motivated you?
20. What sustained you?
21. Describe your emotions during that time.
22. Did you work while in care?
23. Did you have a sense of independence and freedom after emancipation?
24. What did you learn about yourself during emerging adulthood?

4. Adulthood: Self-Development and Attainment of goals

1. How did you support yourself/survive after foster care?
2. Did you set goals for yourself?
3. Did you feel hopeful for your future after foster care?
4. Do you feel being in foster care prevented you from succeeding?
5. Were your social workers helpful in any capacity to assist you?
6. How did you support yourself after emancipation?
7. Did you plan on a career after emancipation?
8. What kept you motivated to keep moving forward in pursuit of your goals?
9. Describe your emotional self during those times.

5. Maturity: Subjective Well-Being, Faith and Spirituality

1. When did you decide on your current profession? How many jobs have you held?
2. How did your life change after foster care?
3. When you reflect back on your foster care experience, what thoughts come to mind?
4. What strategies do you use to overcome challenges?
5. As an adult and you reflect back on your life, what would you change? What would you keep the same? How did you handle the responsibilities of adulthood?
6. What would you say are the major influences for your current status?
7. Are your support system/mentors still in your life?
8. Did you find it difficult to trust adults once on your own?
9. Did you reconnect and establish contact with family?
10. What is the nature of your relationships with family members now?
11. Are there residual feelings of anger toward family members now that you are an adult?
12. What does family mean to you?
13. What is your relationship with your children, significant other/husband?
14. Do you feel you are a better parent now that you have your own children?
15. What would you say to girls in foster care to encourage them?
16. Do you believe your faith sustained you while in foster care?
17. Does your faith give you strength?
18. Do you have a religious belief/practice?

19. Discuss the significance between spirituality and religion and what it means to you.
20. What are you most grateful for now that you are older and wiser?
21. Do you have further insights that you would like to add?

APPENDIX H: USF IRBPHS

IRB APPLICATION #11-097—APPROVED

October 11, 2011

Dear Ms. More:
The Insstitutonal Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #11-097). Please note the following:

Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.

Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS.
Resubmission of the application may be required at that time.

Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

Of you have any questions, pleases contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely;

Terence Patterson, EdD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects